

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN PROFESSIONAL YOUTH FOOTBALL: AN
ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This research was supervised by members of the academic staff but is essentially the work of the author. Views expressed are those of the author and are not necessarily those of any other member of the Research Institute of Sport and Exercise Sciences.

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Declaration

Some of the work conducted has been presented at national/international conferences as listed below:

Conferences

Psychological Development in Professional Youth Football: An Ethnography of Sports psychology Practice; The Football Collective, Manchester – December 2016

Challenges of Confidentiality: Reflections from within Elite Level Professional Football; BASES Annual Conference, Nottingham – November 2016

Reflections from a Female Sports psychology Practitioner Working in Elite Level Professional Football: Practitioner Identity and Development; ECSS Annual Conference, Vienna – July 2016

Delivering a Caring Profession in an Uncaring World: Practical Implications, LJMU RISES PGR Conference, Liverpool – June 2016

Challenges of Confidentiality: Reflections from within Elite Level Professional Football; BASES Student Conference, Bangor – March 2016

The use of Ethnography in Applied Sports psychology: Moral and Ethical Dilemmas; LJMU RISES PGR Conference, Liverpool – July 2015

Practitioner Identity and Development within Elite Level Professional Football: A Tale of 12 Months; BASES Student Conference, Liverpool – March 2015

Abstract

The introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) by the Premier League in 2012, and the subsequent formalization of sports psychology support, has resulted in increased opportunities for sports psychology practitioners to deliver their work within football academies (Nesti, 2012). The recognition of psychological support by the EPPP adds a new importance for us to better understand the impact of the lived experiences of applied practitioners within professional football clubs on their professional development and identity formation (Mitchell *et al.*, 2016). The data on which this thesis is based has been drawn from research collected during a 3-year period from 2014 to 2017, where I (the researcher) occupied a dual role as a practitioner-researcher within the organisation of study. More specifically, I was responsible for the delivery of a psychological development program to academy players, support staff, and parents, and for the collection of data using ethnographic research methods. The first empirical chapter explored the use of practitioner-researcher ethnography as a research approach in sports psychology. Critical reflections highlighted some of the challenges that I faced whilst engaging in this dual role. Findings from this chapter highlighted the value of ethnography in encouraging the development of critical thinking skills, and self-awareness. However, a number of moral and ethical dilemmas arose because of the research demands. Therefore, it is suggested that a variety of support mechanisms (peer support, ethnography club) may help ethnographer's better deal with challenging research situations that they may face. Following on from this, chapter 3 of the thesis used creative narratives to illuminate the impact of my experiences of delivering psychological support within one professional football club on my professional development, and identity as a sports psychology practitioner. My development journey aligned to the ICM (Côté, 2016), and was not smooth, or without challenge. In contrast, it was a rocky road (Collins & MacNamara, 2012), signified by a number of critical moments (Littlewood & Nesti, 2011). The challenges that I faced within the professional football club occurred as a function of the organisational culture (Roper, 2008), and ran parallel with the experiences of the youth players within this particular social context. The findings from this chapter suggest that identity is not a distinct end-point that sports psychology practitioners reach at the conclusion of their professional training. In contrast, identity is argued to be a fluid concept, continually evolving based upon the experiences that we have. Chapter 4 of the thesis followed the same structure as chapter 3, and presented the lived experiences of academy footballers over a longitudinal time frame. The findings that emerged within the chapter suggest that despite considerable changes in professional football over recent years the traditional masculine culture of this particular social context has remained reluctant to change (Nesti, 2012), and may be detrimental to the healthy psychological development of players who exist within it. Finally, chapter 5 of the thesis used action research principles to document the design, delivery, and evaluation of the psychological development program that was implemented within the professional football club. More specifically, interviews, focus groups, and evaluation sheets were used to attain the perspectives of key stakeholders (players, support staff, parents). The findings from this chapter demonstrated the complexities of psychological development, especially within the professional football culture. A level of confusion was present between stakeholders regarding the efficacy of the program. Although all individuals agreed that the program was beneficial in facilitating communication, and creating a supportive environment, there were discrepancies regarding its impact, and the nature of delivery.

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Biographical Positioning

When conducting ethnographic research methods, experts have suggested that it is important for the author to make the reader aware of their biographic positioning in relation to the research process (Bowles, 2014; Foley, 2002; Littlewood, 2005; Maitland, 2012). This is due to the researcher's relationship with, and influence on the social world that is being studied. I chose to position this piece prior to chapter 1, as I believe that my positioning shaped and influenced the nature of the thesis, and the way in which the research was conducted.

Since an early age, sport has always been my passion, but beyond anything else, I loved football. My family lived, and breathed the game. My dad is a failed footballer, my cousin was a youth international and academy scholar, and my brother was signed to a professional football academy. When I was 10 years old, I joined a local boys' team. Being the only female never crossed my mind, and I thrived when given the opportunity to play competitive games. My family, and my friends always supported my interest in football, and every day the 'lads' at school would put my name down for the lunchtime footie match. When I was with these individuals being a girl did not mean I was different, or any less capable, I was just another person. However, a couple of years later, rules were introduced that meant I was no longer able to play in the same team as my male counterparts, so I signed for a Girls Centre of Excellence. In the early 2000's there were limited opportunities in the UK for women to make a professional career in the game, however I believed that things would change. On my 16th birthday, I signed for one of the best Women's teams in the country, and it is no exaggeration to say that I was thrown in at the deep end. I was introduced straight into the 1st team, and had to learn how to cope with not only the transition from youth to senior football, but also the significant jump up in playing level. I relished in the challenge, and was determined to succeed. Determination and dedication were two words that I became very

familiar with during my childhood. They were values that my Dad placed a great emphasis on, and I grew to share his belief. Determination and dedication became the foundation of my identity.

Alongside football, I studied for my A-levels. The lack of growth in the Women's game meant that I needed to seriously consider other career pathways; I applied for a place to study Sport and Exercise Science at University. I knew at this point that sports psychology was the discipline that I was most interested in. This stemmed from my own playing experiences, and from the observation of top athlete's performances on television. As I progressed at University, I found balancing my studies, and playing elite level Women's football increasingly challenging. Eventually, I decided that my studies had to come first. This was a bitter pill to swallow. However, my focus was now clear. I wanted to work in elite sport, and support other athletes to have a successful sporting career. Upon my transition out of Women's football, my attitude towards elite sports performers began to change. I no longer solely thought of them as high performing, and distant professionals, rather I was interested in them, as people. My consulting philosophy was starting to take shape. In the final year of my degree, I was granted the opportunity to complete a placement with elite youth swimmers. I thoroughly enjoyed being on the other side of sports performance, it felt like my calling, and further re-enforced my beliefs on the importance of the humanistic side of sports psychology.

Following the completion of my undergraduate degree, I enrolled onto a masters in sports psychology, and started my professional training with the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES). During my MSc, I was successful in attaining a 6-month placement with Burrington City FC. This was of particular significance to me, it was the club that my cousin attained his first professional contract, and experienced a number of deeply personal challenges. Because of his experiences, I believed that I had a greater level of understanding of some of the

broader challenges that youth footballers may face as they transition through a professional football academy. I entered the setting more aware of the long-term impact of the professional football culture than I would have if my background and life experiences were different. In line with my placement experiences at Burrington City FC, my interest in ethnography, and practitioner-researcher methods developed. To me, engaging in research that had an applied focus made sense, and I was drawn by the idea of being able to represent findings using alternative writing styles. During my 6-month placement with Burrington City FC, I observed the daily working practices of the organisation, and started to develop an understanding of how this particular professional football club operated. The EPPP had been recently introduced by the Premier League, and therefore the club was required to formalize the delivery of sports psychology support. Having been embedded within the organisation for the previous 6 months it was decided through discussions between Burrington City FC, Liverpool John Moores University, and myself that it would be mutually beneficial for me to progress my role and become responsible for the delivery of psychological support, and enroll onto the present thesis.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Professional football is a sporting game watched and played by millions of people worldwide each year (Parker, 1996). For example, the 2014 World Cup reached 3.2 billion viewers, with the final alone attracting over 1 billion viewers (FIFA, 2015). In the United Kingdom (UK), professional football dominates the sporting scene. It attracts the most media interest, offers lucrative rewards, and has the largest global reach (Nesti, 2010). Each of these factors has led to professional footballers becoming idolized, admired, and honored as local and national heroes (McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006). In addition to the fame and admiration, McGill (2001) suggested that professional football offers people the opportunity to become rich at a young age whilst playing the game they love. Professional footballers are some of the highest paid sportsmen on the planet (Bryson, et al., 2014), and financially professional football continues to expand at a rapid rate. Bryson, Rossi, and Simmons (2014) suggested that ‘superstar’ salaries are commonly offered to players, which was exemplified during the 2016 summer transfer window. English Premier League (EPL) clubs spent £1.1 billion to bring in new additions to their squads, £230 million more than the same transfer window 12 months previously (World Heritage Encyclopedia, 2016) On the surface, professional football comes across as a highly desirable sport with huge rewards for success (Nesti, 2010).

In stark contrast, researchers have also suggested that in the EPL the punishments for failure e.g. poor results are so severe that they can only be compared to high-level politics (Nesti, 2010). This was illustrated during the 2015/16 season in the top four English leagues, where the average manager lasted just 1.47 years in charge of their club (League Managers Association, LMA, 2016). The volatile, fast changing and ruthless world of professional football is further demonstrated at

youth levels. Few industries recruit and develop potential employees from such a young age as those within professional football (Platts, 2012). Young boys are scouted and signed by clubs when they are as young as 5 years old. These boys train 3, sometimes 4 times per week, and based on their performances during training and matches are retained or released at the end of each football season. Competition for places within English academies is intense. Each year over 1000 boys are contracted to a professional club between the ages of 9 and 16 (Platts, 2012). In spite of this, few boys will ever succeed in attaining a professional contract (Adams, 2015). In fact, Anderson and Miller, (2011) stated that only 10% of academy players who receive a youth scholar will attain a professional contract at the age of 18. They went on to add that of those who are fortunate enough to be offered a professional contract, only one in four will remain in the professional game beyond their 23st birthday. These statistics offer an alternative view to the previously painted picture of luxury and fame that comes with the worldwide popularity of the game, and player wages. This may create operational insecurity within players and thus the broader culture at play within the game (Adams, 2015).

Professional football is not only a unique sport in relation to its financial and global output; the culture within the game is also unlike many other sports (Roderick, 2006). Researchers in the field (Clayton, & Humblestone 2006; Nesti, 2010; Parker, 1996, 2001; Richardson, Gilbourne, and Littlewood 2004) have described the professional football culture as harsh, brutal, and volatile. This is more profound in professional football when compared to other sports due to its particularly working class environment (Nesti, 2012). The sport is now filled with lower and middle class aspirational people, as opposed to Rugby League and Rugby Union, which is dominated by middle and upper class individuals. Indeed, Parker (1995) described the occupational domain of professional football as revolving around a strict diet of authoritarianism, ruthlessness, and a hyper

masculine workplace. His findings were based on a study exploring the culture and lived experiences of professional youth players in a British context. Richardson *et al.* (2004) furthered this, and suggested that professional football displays an aggressively masculine culture, where players are socialized into masking over their true feelings and displaying macho behaviors. The social context of professional football poses a unique set of challenges for youth players, and links closely to the central focus of the current thesis, which aims to explore the psychological development of youth players within a professional football talent development environment.

1.1.1 Relevance and Importance of the Thesis

The previous section introduced the unique talent development setting of professional football. This section will further discuss the relevance and importance of the thesis in deepening our current understanding of sports psychology in professional football, and adding new levels of knowledge. The lack of emerging talent within English academies has become increasingly concerning for the English Football Association (FA). Therefore, in 2011 the EPL (English Premier League) proposed the introduction of a new player development system known as the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP). The EPPP was implemented at the start of the 2012-13 football season, and involved an investment of £320million from the Premier League (Horrocks *et al.*, 2016). At its core, the EPPP is a long term Premier League initiated strategy with the aim of creating the optimal talent development environment for youth footballers. It is hoped that the EPPP will contribute to an increasing number of boys who join their local club aged 8 or 9, and go on to play for their local club's first team. The Director of Youth Football at the Premier League, Ged Roddy, (2012) explained that the focus of the EPPP was on providing a more holistic support program with an increased focus on welfare, safeguarding, education, and mentoring to facilitate all aspects of development. Inclusive within this were formal requirements regarding the delivery of

psychological support for players across the Foundation Phase (FP), Youth Development Phase (YDP), and Professional Development Phase (PDP) of development.

Adams (2015) suggested that the recent implementation of the EPPP in English Football academies brings fresh importance to any study of individuals' experiences as they progress within a football organisation. The introduction of the EPPP has had implications on the working practices of both staff and players within professional football clubs, meaning that research is needed to further understand the ways in which the EPPP has influenced applied sports psychology practice. Other than the work of Roe and Parker (2016), who provided a case study on the utilization of sports chaplaincy within a professional club, there have been no published studies to date that have explored the impact or effectiveness of the EPPP as a youth development framework. Therefore, there is a gap in the current literature on the daily working practices in professional football since the introduction of the EPPP as a talent development system.

The unique talent development environment within English professional football poses a distinctive set of challenges for youth players as they transition through a professional football club (Mitchell *et al.*, 2014). Researchers have explored these challenges from a psychological perspective (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Mills *et al.*, 2012; Reeves *et al.*, 2009) using interviews with both players and coaches. Reeves *et al.* (2009) found that while there were some similarities in the challenges faced by early and middle adolescents, stressors changed as players matured. Commonly cited stressors included; relationship with coaches, deselection, making errors, team performance, dealing with expectations, and competitive and existential anxiety (Nesti, 2010; Reeves *et al.*, 2009). In some situations, it can be suggested that the culture of professional football may serve to enhance the psychological demands placed on players (Mitchell, *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, researchers have highlighted the need for appropriate support mechanisms to be put

in place across all stages of development within professional football (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006). In 2012, the EPPP recognised these suggestions, and requirements and recommendations were set regarding the psychological support of youth team players. In other words, the EPPP made it a mandatory requirement for academy clubs to have an individual employed with the role of ‘providing psychological support’ to youth players. As a result of this requirement, there has been an increase in the number of opportunities for sports psychology practitioners working in an academy context on either a part time or a full time basis (Nesti & Sulley, 2014). The recognition of psychological support by the EPPP supports the value in studying psychological development within elite youth football, both from a player and a practitioner perspective. Further to this, it adds a new importance to better understand how a sports psychologist may operate within professional football at youth levels.

Given the increasing attention, significance, and importance placed on youth development within England, it is surprising that the inner workings of professional football remain so mythologized and little researched (Roderick, 2006). There is an abundance of literature measuring player’s psychological state before and after a single intervention (Vealey, 1994). Further to this, there are a number of qualitative articles interviewing key stakeholders on understanding and developing mental toughness (Crust, 2008). However, it is suggested that insightful and substantive contributions regarding the daily working practices, and realities of the UK’s most televised game are few and far between (Nesti, 2010). The closed atmosphere, and reluctance to accept outsiders has been recognised as a significant barrier to the delivery of psychological support (Nesti, 2010; Parker, 1996). Those who have explored the experiences of youth footballers from within a football club have focused on single issues such as education (Bourke, 2003; Monk, 2006; Monk & Olsson, 2000), identity (Brown & Potrac, 2009), and managerial control (Cushion & Jones,

2006). Each of these studies focused on the findings from a sociological perspective, exploring human interactions in relation to society. Nesti (2010) further highlighted the lack of important psychological research within professional football. Platts (2015) supported this and stated that limited attention has been afforded to issues relating to the welfare and psychological provisions available to young footballers in the professional game. This thesis offers a sports psychology practitioner's account of delivering psychological support within a professional football academy, where unrestricted access to the organisation was granted. More specifically, this meant access to the training ground, match games, and all individuals within the football club.

Over the last decade, there has been increased acceptance of reflective practice articles, and autobiographical accounts of applied sports psychologists consulting experiences (Collins *et al.*, 2013; Holt & Streat, 2001; Lindsay *et al.*, 2007; Owton *et al.*, 2013). The aim of this type of research is to create a greater awareness of the realities of working with an athlete or sporting organisation. However, the focus of many of these articles has been somewhat narrow, exploring a certain topic or aspect of applied practice such as the development of a congruent philosophy (e.g., Collins *et al.*, 2013; Holt & Streat, 2013; Lindsay *et al.*, 2007). For example, Ravizza (2002) proposed a philosophical construct grounded in existential psychology as a framework for performance enhancement based on his consulting experiences with elite athletes. Placing a sole focus on one aspect of applied practice has limitations in deepening and broadening our understanding of practitioner experiences from a holistic perspective. A more complete exploration of sports psychology practitioners' experiences would have implications for the education and training routes of other aspiring sports psychologists within the UK.

A further limitation of the practitioner reflection based literature is the setting in which the research has been conducted. Much of the research has been carried out from within government or lottery

funded sports over short-term engagements, for example at training camps (e.g., Collins *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, the experiences of sports psychologists working in professional sport settings that are not funded by the state or lottery have received limited attention in the academic literature (Nesti, 2010). Researchers have offered a number of explanations for this. The first of which is that sports psychology has typically been better received within lower levels of sport (Cruikshank & Collins, 2013; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), secondly elite sport environments are notoriously hard to access (Eubank *et al.*, 2014; Nesti, 2010). Finally, Nesti (2004) highlighted that those athletes operating at elite levels have already developed advanced mental skills. McDougal, Nesti, and Richardson (2015) research provided exceptions to this. Nesti (2004) presented the case study of a sports psychologist operating in an English Premier League club, and McDougal, Nesti, and Richardson (2015) interviewed a range of established sports psychologists working in elite level sport. It is important to highlight their work because it hails from a vastly different perspective, and considers the operationalizing of a sports psychologist in a setting and level of sport, which for the reasons noted above is rarely encountered in the literature. McDougal *et al.* (2017) concluded that further research investigating the challenges faced by neophyte practitioners working in elite sport would add a useful perspective to the current literature base. Authors (Cruikshank & Collins, 2013; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Fletcher *et al.*, 2011) have noted the consequences of a lack of scholarly work in elite domains as leading to individuals either not being suitably trained, or suitably supported to deal with specific aspects of professional sport consultancy.

Despite the increasing number of scholarly articles exploring the experiences of sports psychology practitioners, a relatively small proportion of this work has focused on female consultants. Research that has explored the experiences of female practitioners has been conducted in US sport

settings. For example, Roper (2008) examined the career experiences and perceptions of eight female practitioners working in applied sports psychology. She identified several barriers that women may face when entering the applied domain; a) entrance into applied sports psychology, b) women's status in applied sports psychology, c) gender discrimination, d) gaining access, e) family and balance. These barriers indicate that there are a number of difficulties for the female sports psychologist to overcome, both before she enters the domain and during her work. Roper (2008) further suggested that these difficulties might be exaggerated for those practitioners working in male dominated sports. This may be attributed to dominance of masculine behaviors, for example authoritarian styles of management, a reluctance to display any sign of weakness, and negative perceptions of female's ability to be effective in these cultures. There is a gap in the literature for research exploring the experiences of a female sports psychology practitioner working in a male dominated sport, in a British context. Given the recent introduction of the EPPP within professional football, increasing opportunities for sports psychologists, and that over 75% of students studying psychology are female it is anticipated that more opportunities will arise for female practitioners to operate at academy levels (Nesti, 2012).

In order to build upon the current state of research on practitioner experiences in sports psychology, ethnography has been considered as an appropriate method (Sparkes, 2002). Researchers have long recommended ethnography as a research method that will extend understanding and create new forms of knowledge (Krane & Baird, 2001). Ethnography enables us to experience events from within an organisation, giving us a new and different perspective. Indeed, Maitland (2012) suggested that ethnography allows us to get close to the action and immerse ourselves in the setting to take into account the many things that may be going on. The use of ethnography as a research method posed a further advantage in allowing for the study of the organisation over a longitudinal

time frame. This thesis is based on around 4000 hours of applied practice within the organisation across a 36-month time span. Therefore, the level to which the researcher was embedded, and the longitudinal nature of this research project offers a deeper account of applied practice than much of the previous research, and arguably allows for the development of an authentic understanding of the professional football culture within one specific organisational setting.

In summary, the thesis supplements current literature within sports psychology, and adds the perspective of a female practitioner working in elite level professional football over a longitudinal period.

1.1.2 Thesis Objectives

In light of the issues presented thus far, the aim of the present thesis is to critically explore the journey of a neophyte sports psychology practitioner working within elite youth professional football. More specifically, a series of inter-related research objectives will be addressed:

1. To deepen the current understanding on how applied sports psychology practitioners may best operate within the unique culture of professional football. *(This will be addressed in Chapter Three, Chapter Four, and Chapter Five).*
2. To critically explore the use of practitioner-researcher ethnography as a research method in applied sports psychology. *(This will be addressed in Chapter Two)*
3. To explore the perceptions of players and practitioners (e.g. academy staff and coaches) within a professional football club on the psychological development of youth team players at distinctive phases of the football career. *(This will be addressed in Chapter Four, and Chapter Five).*

4. To document the design, implementation, delivery, and evaluation of a bespoke psychological development program employed within a professional football club. (*This will be addressed in Chapter Five*).
5. To capture the impact of a trainee applied sports psychology practitioner's experiences of working within professional football on practitioner identity and professional development over a longitudinal time frame. (*This will be addressed in Chapter Three*).

1.1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The chosen thesis structure is informed by the reality and complexities of my work as a sport psychology practitioner-researcher over the duration of the research project. This section provides further justification for the structure of the thesis, and outlines the content of each chapter.

Following a traditional representation style, the literature review is positioned prior to the methodology and empirical chapters of the thesis. The aim of this is to inform the reader of relevant prior research and appropriate theoretical perspectives. More specifically, Chapter 1 critically reviews the existing research with relation to the objectives of the study; in particular the culture of professional football, psychological development and sports psychology within professional football, and practitioner development literature. The literature review exposes gaps in the existing literature base, and demonstrates the relevance of the research in both furthering our understanding of operating as a sports psychology practitioner in professional football, and offering practical implications.

Chapter 2 is an empirical chapter detailing the ethnographic research methodology. I have chosen to present the methodology prior to the empirical chapters of the thesis as it informs the reader of the data collection methods employed to yield the thesis findings. More specifically, this chapter

details the process of the research from entering the setting through to the write up, and provides detailed consideration on the choice of ethnography, the research paradigm, data collection methods, methodological rigor, and the positioning of the researcher within the research. It also provides reflections on my experiences of using the ethnographic research method. Within this sub-section, I reflect on entering the setting, being an insider vs outsider, dealing with the dual role as a practitioner-researcher, and highlight the moral and ethical dilemmas I experienced.

Following on from the methodology, I present three empirical chapters. Each of these aims to extend our knowledge and understanding of the professional football culture, especially in relation to the psychological development of youth players, and the delivery of sports psychology support. At the starting point of data collection, the order of the chapters had not been decided. Therefore, I entered the setting with a broad lens, and attended to any event or discussion that addressed the objectives of the study. The primary focus of the thesis was not consultancy evaluation; this aspect was introduced at a later stage in the data collection. More specifically, this came at a point when I aimed to better understand the thoughts of key stakeholders (players, staff, parent's) within the organisation on the efficacy of the psychological development program that I was delivering. As the research project developed, and through discussions with critical friends it became clear that my own experiences within the organisation should be positioned after the methodology, and prior to the other empirical chapters. If a different applied practitioner was to engage in the same study it is highly unlikely that their experiences would have mirrored my own. This might be the result of a number of factors, for example; personal background, values and beliefs, practitioner philosophy, and career stage. Therefore, it is hoped that by first providing the reader with my own journey, that they will then attend to the rest of the thesis as though they had experienced the organisation in the same way that I did. In addition to this, I believe that by attaining an

understanding of how my experiences within the organisation influenced my own professional development and identity, the reader will be better informed as to why I chose to practice in the way that I did.

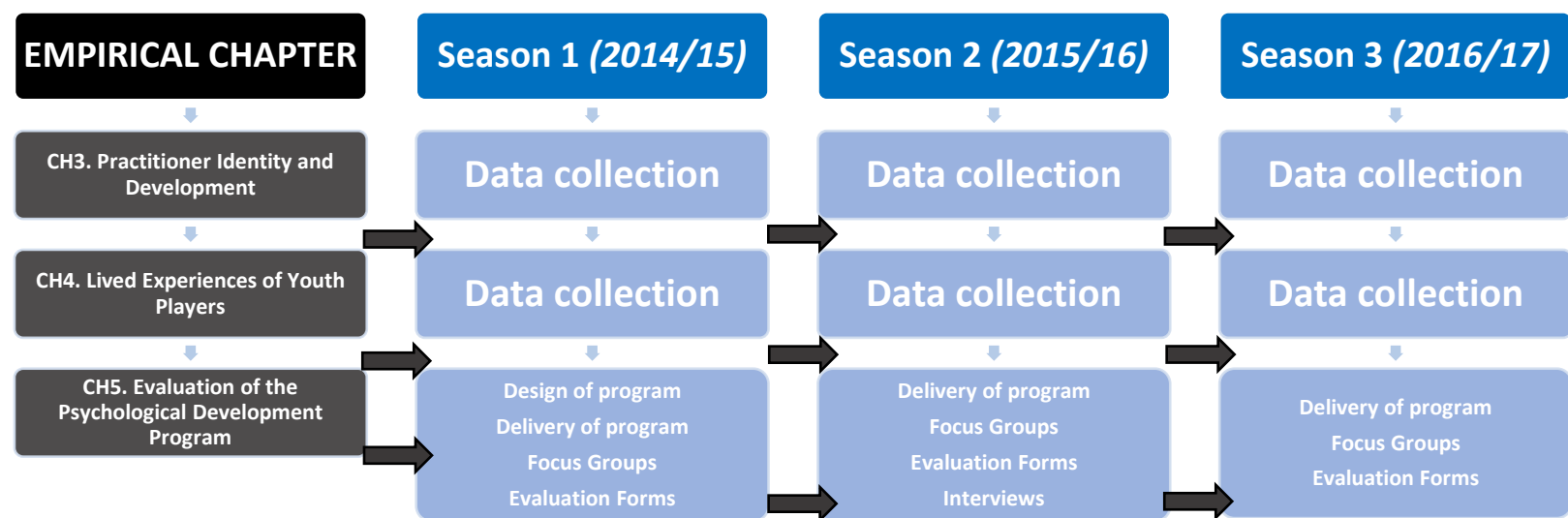
During the data collection phase, I noticed a strong parallel between my own experiences within the organisation, and the experiences of youth players. Chapter 4 builds upon chapter 3 and uses a similar representation style to document the lived experiences of elite youth level football players within a professional football club. A series of narratives explore how player's experiences influenced their identity, psychological development, and consequent actions within this specific social context. Implications for the delivery of sports psychology within professional football, and the education of key stakeholders is discussed.

At this point in the thesis, the reader will have an understanding of my experiences as both an ethnographic researcher and a sport psychology practitioner, and the experiences of youth players across the 3-year period within the professional football culture. Each of the previous chapters informed the design and delivery of the sport psychology development program during a 3-month period of observation conducted at the beginning of data collection. In line with this, chapter 5 details the cycle of design, implementation, and evaluation of the psychological development program using feedback from different stakeholders. Consideration is given to a range of stakeholders' perceptions on the delivery of sports psychology, and future directions for sports psychology practice within professional football.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis and outlines the implications with regards to the use of ethnography as a methodology, practical implications for the EPPP, professional training routes of sports psychology within the UK, and implications for other sports psychologists hoping to work within

professional football. Finally, future research is outlined that would further contribute to the field of study.

Below, a schematic is presented that depicts the ‘real’ timelines of each of the empirical studies. The aim of this is to enhance the readers understanding of the concurrency and interplay between the different sections of the thesis. As demonstrated in the schematic, data collection for each of the empirical chapters occurred simultaneously across the 3-year period. With regards to chapter 5, the interviews took place mid-way through the second season because of the significant organisational change that was occurring at an academy and first team level within the organisation of study.



1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review aims to provide the reader with a contextual and background understanding of appropriate material in relation to the objectives of the thesis. A significant breadth and overview of identified literature sources that are specifically related to the purpose of the thesis are presented. It is hoped that each of these sub-topics will better inform the reader when they reach the empirical chapters of the thesis, especially with relation to why events may or may

not have happened. The aim of this section is to orient the reader as to the location of the thesis within the literature, and justify the chosen structure. The overriding focus of the thesis is culture, specifically the influence of the professional football culture on the lived experiences, and psychological development of those who exist within it. Given the unrestricted, and longitudinal access that I was granted as a practitioner-researcher, the study lent itself to establishing a deeper understanding of a little studied context. Although culture is identified as the core focus of the thesis it is not presented at the beginning, or end of the literature review. Rather, I aim to take the reader through appropriate literature as though they are reading a story, each sub-topic aims to set the scene for what is presented in the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

The first section of the literature review explores talent development in professional football. This thesis occurred within one professional football academy where the focus is primarily on identifying and developing talented young footballers. Therefore, it is important to make the reader aware of the current talent development pathway and framework that exists in professional football. The core focus of the thesis is then presented under the title '*Characteristics of the professional football culture*'. This section explores a range of sub-cultural features (e.g. access, management style, banter), and educates the reader on how the cultural characteristics of professional football might shape the actions of players and support staff. Following on from this, I critically review current literature that has evaluated applied sport psychology services, with a focus on the acceptance and delivery of sport psychology support in professional football. Finally, a number of different approaches to identity are presented, and considered with relation to each of the thesis objectives.

1.3 TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN YOUTH SPORT

1.3.1 Introducing Talent Development

Talent identification and development (TID) is of great importance for sporting organisations and governing bodies. Abott and Collins (2002) commented that there has been a global growth in the interest of effectively identifying and developing talented athletes. For example, 15% of UK sport's central funding is allocated to athlete development (UK Sport, 2012). This may be attributed to the financial rewards and recognition associated with the development of an effective system to produce elite level athletes (Martindale, et al., 2007). TID has been studied across a range of individual and team sports with male and female athletes in Western nations (Littlewood, 2005), and has clear implications for sports practitioners, researchers, and the public (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013). These implications relate to the development of an optimal environment for talented athletes, the role of key stakeholders, and models of practice.

Williams & Reilly (2000) defined talent development, and suggested that it involves providing individuals with an appropriate learning environment where their potential can be achieved. These learning environments are important for young athletes of all ages. Particularly, as many sports (e.g. UK football, British Swimming, British Cycling) now recruit individuals from as young as 6 and place them in sport specific development programs. Primarily TID aims to increase the probability of selecting a future elite athlete at an early age.

Researchers have objectively quantified predictors of sporting talent from a sports science perspective (Reilly et al., 2000; Williams & Franks, 1998). More specifically, these involve the assessment of an individual's physical, psychological, perceptual-cognitive, and sociological characteristics (Littlewood, 2005). With regards to the physical predictors of talent;

anthropometric (Malina, et al., 2000), and physiological characteristics are measured and used as a basis to distinguish elite and non-elite young athletes (Franks, et al., 1999). Although physical measures are important in the identification and development of young athletes, the examination of physical measures alone presents a major barrier (Abbotts & Collins, 2002). This is because other important concepts such as team interaction, decision-making, tactical awareness, and psychological characteristics are ignored (Burgess & Naughton, 2010).

TID researchers (MacNamara *et al.*, 2010; McGregor & Elliot, 2002; Pankhurst & Collins, 2013) have identified the importance of psychological skills in predicting successful performance. Some of these psychological skills may include; confidence, concentration, commitment, and resilience, and can be executed during training or competition (Pankhurst, 2014). Certain individuals may be genetically pre-disposed to possessing particular psychological attributes, whereas others may have to acquire these during development. Although the importance of an individual's psychological skillset has frequently been identified as pivotal when describing what it takes to reach an elite level (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006), it has been little studied from a TID perspective. Despite this, researchers (MacNamara *et al.*, 2010; Weiss, Bhalla, & Price, 2008) have identified the specific psychological characteristics essential for elite performance at adult level. Pertinently however, there is no evidence to suggest that psychological characteristics remain stable from adolescence to adulthood in the context of elite sport. This only adds to the complexity of the psychological component within the TID process. It is suggested that those individuals responsible for the sporting development of young individuals should allocate sufficient resources to the development of their psychological skills.

1.3.2. Talent Development Models

Sport specialization has been the topic of attention for a number of researchers within TID (Côté et al. 2007; Malina, 2010), and links specialization in a single sport to early specialization (Pankhurst, 2015, p.6). Early specialization was defined by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2000) as young children participating at a competitive level in one sport throughout a calendar year. Support for the early specialization model is based on two assumptions, however these are yet to be confirmed (Cote, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007). The first is that future elite performers distinguish themselves from their non-elite counterparts during the early stages of development. The second is that sport specific, organized practice is superior to deliberate play or practice in other sports (Ericsson, et al., 1993).

Bloom (1985) critiqued the first assumption, and suggested that in retrospect we cannot accurately predict potential experts at the early stages of development (p.533). He concluded that top performances at senior level were not accompanied by top performances at junior level. More recent research has replicated these findings. For example, Gullich (2011) explored the sporting narratives of nearly 3000 elite senior German athletes. Results showed a clear positive relationship between early specialization and early success, but a negative relationship between early specialization and adult success. This highlights the need for talent development models that are specific to an individual's developmental stage.

In relation to the second assumption, Ericsson *et al.* (1993) theorized that those individuals who miss out on early specialization might find it impossible to overcome their disadvantage. He proposed that talent plays a minimal role in the development of expertise, and instead introduced the notion of deliberate practice. Ericsson's results demonstrated a direct relationship between the number of hours of deliberate practice and level of performance over a period of at least 10 years

in expert musicians. Ward *et al.* (2004) explored the use of deliberate practice in elite youth footballers. Results found play and non-sport specific practice had no influence on a player's skill level, whereas the number of hours of deliberate practice was positively correlated with performance level. More recently, the model of deliberate practice has been critiqued (Hambrick, *et al.*, 2013). Ericsson *et al.* (1993) overlooked the importance of other factors such as genetic predisposition, role of key stakeholders, and the development environment (Burgess & Naughton, 2010).

A final critique of the TID literature to date is the data collection methods that have been used to inform practice (Cote, Baker, Abernethy, 2007). Qualitative interviews, training questionnaires, and retrospective quantitative methods have dominated. Retrospective methods have been employed because TID research has been unable to isolate variables that accurately predict a young athlete's future sporting success (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001). However, the use of retrospective methods relies on participants accurately recalling their development pathway. Researchers may use cues to help facilitate recall; however, this may have the undesired effect of shaping participant's responses. In summary, studying the development of expertise in sport is much more complex than studying learning in controlled laboratory environments (Cote, Baker, Abernethy, 2007).

1.3.3 Talent Development Environments

The importance of the environment has been acknowledged by a number of TID researchers (Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010; Martindale *et al.* 2005; Reilly, & Richardson, 2001). For example, Martindale & Mortimer (2011) and Weiss *et al.* (2008) noted the importance of the coaching environment in enabling athletes to acquire the necessary physical, technical, tactical, and psychological skills for performance over a longitudinal period. Furthermore, Richardson &

Reilly (2001) claimed that a child's surrounding environment would have an effect on their behaviors, emotions, and attributes. Henriksen *et al.*, (2010) built on this, and explored the influence of the overall athletic talent development environment (ATDE) on talent development. Their research used a case study methodology with the Danish national sailing team. A range of data collection methods with multiple stakeholders allowed for an in-depth understanding of this particular ATDE. Results suggested that a more holistic approach to talent development, beyond the focus of the individual would be beneficial. Further to this, Henrikson *et al.* (2010) highlighted the need for further research from practitioners operating within specific sport environments to establish common features of successful ATDE's. Henriksen *et al.* (2010, 2011) identified that it is not only the macro environment, and sport domain that an individual exists within that will influence talent development. In contrast, it is also the interaction between segments of the environment, the organisational culture, and the athlete's ability to make the best use of their own resources that will determine whether an athlete is successful or not in the long term. Despite this, consequent work has failed to build on Henrikson *et al.*'s findings. A lack of research within the context of English youth football leads us to believe that not enough is known about how we may optimize this particular sporting environment.

1.3.4 Role of the Stakeholders

It is important to remember that there are many more factors involved in the development of talented athletes than just the direct process of coaching. Sport researchers (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Richardson & Reilly, 2001) have identified the role of key stakeholders as a crucial component of youth development in sport. These stakeholders may include parents, peers, coaches, and teachers. Richardson and Reilly (2001) suggested that the influence of these stakeholders might be an important factor in a child's perception of sport participation. Burgess & Naughton

(2010) built on this work and noted that during adolescence an individual's relationships with key stakeholders is likely to influence their decision-making, motivation, and training habits.

Bloom (1985) endorsed the significance of the parental role in youth development, and suggested that parents are often those responsible for introducing their child to sport whether of a fun or competitive nature. Côté (1999) supported the work of Bloom (1985) and identified the importance of parents in encouraging, supporting, and displaying a positive attitude towards their child's competitive sporting experiences. Hill & Tisdall (1997) identified that effective or ineffective parenting may shape a child's actions and behaviors. More specifically, parents may positively or negatively affect a child's beliefs, values, and behaviors towards sport and those involved in sport through their interactions (Cahill & Pearl, 1993; Littlewood, 2005).

Peers have also been identified as significant others who may exert influence on a young individual's attitude towards recreational and competitive sport (Patrick, et al., 1999). However, the recognition of this in TID programs is limited. Therefore, it is suggested that the role of peers is still to be fully understood.

The third group of stakeholders in the TID process is the coaches. Bloom (1985) discussed the importance of providing young athletes with an appropriate coach for their specific stage of development. More recently, authors (Abraham *et al.*, 2006; Abraham & Collins, 2012, Vickers, 2011) identified the role of the coach in delivering appropriate sessions, making decisions to best meet the needs of the developing athletes, and integrating coaching into a holistic talent development program. However, literature that exists within this field has tended to focus on coaching issues as opposed to the sociological aspects of the coaching process (Cushion, 2001).

1.4 TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

This component of the literature review builds upon the previous section and explores TD within the specific context of professional football. Firstly, the author presents a critical and historical overview of the different youth development systems that have been employed within English academies. The most recent modernization of youth development in English football is then discussed in more detail, and the subsequent impact of this on the daily working practices of both staff and players within the game is reviewed. Thirdly, a staffing model for a modern academy is presented alongside the typical transition pathway for a young footballer entering a professional football club. The aim of this section is to provide the reader with a detailed understanding of the structure and operations of English football academies.

1.4.1 A History of Youth Development in Football

The FA first acknowledged the importance of youth development in the early 1950's. This coincided with a national recession, where the number of unemployed citizens rose, and fans attendance at matches reduced (Platts & Smith, 2009). The FA encouraged football clubs to place a greater emphasis on developing and bringing through young talent. However, it wasn't until the late 1960's that the FA modified their rules and regulations to incorporate the title 'apprentice'. The use of this title signified a change in the youth development pathway. Clubs were allowed to enroll players aged 15 with the aim of facilitating the successful development of a young player into a member of the clubs first team squad. Players were recruited by scouts who attended local school games and selected the most talented individuals (Burns, 1996).

Since the first introduction of the title 'football apprentice' there has been a number of youth development strategies operationalized within the football industry (Littlewood, 2005). These

strategies have recognised the importance of providing players with more than just football coaching. For example, in the late 1970s the Players Football Association (PFA), and the Football League (FL), introduced the Footballers Further Education and Vocational Training Scheme (FFEVTs). The aim of this was to provide players with adequate education in preparation for a life after football (Dabschenk, 1986). As a reaction to the national recession, the conservative government launched the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) nationwide in 1983. The aim of the YTS was to provide more employment opportunities for young individuals by offering commercial businesses a subsidy if they agreed to provide training for the young and unemployed (Platts & Smith, 2009). A year later, the FA adopted the same model for young footballers. YTS were valued by clubs as they were offered an income in return for recruiting and developing talented young players (Monk & Russell, 2000). In practice, the YTS provided players with a structured training program to develop their sporting talent coupled with education (Littlewood, 2005). The YTS also provided trainees with some level of security at their club. All players were offered a two-year guaranteed traineeship in which to progress their career as a footballer, or otherwise prepare for a different vocation.

Despite significant advancements in the youth development pathway for young footballers between 1945 and the 1980s, the British government continued to express serious concern regarding the way in which the YT scheme was administered by professional football clubs. During the 1990's youth football underwent a period of considerable change. Football academies, and Centre's of Excellence (CoE) were formally introduced across England and Wales. This resulted in greater academic flexibility, and opportunities. For example, the FA introduced a core life skills program that was compulsory for all clubs to deliver to youth scholars. In 1998, the FA

made the 'Football Scholarship' apprenticeship scheme compulsory for all academies and CoE's. Furthermore, football scholarships were extended to a 3-year program as opposed to 2 years.

In addition to the foundation of football academies and CoE's, the FA *Charter for Quality* was introduced by Howard Wilkinson, the then FA technical director (1997). The primary aim of the charter for quality was to improve the quality of support provided for young players from the age of 8 through to 23. More specifically, this related to sustaining participation rates, and improving performance both on and off the football field (The FA, 1997). The introduction of the charter for quality also signified the beginning of a gradual acceptance and use of sports science as a development mechanism within football academies (Littlewood, 2005). Williams & Reilly (2000) identified the benefits of this in supplementing subjective assessments of a players' talent with objective measures. Early sports science support delivery was dominated by a physiological or strength and conditioning discipline (Pain & Harwood, 2007). Of relevance to this study was the later introduction of sports psychology at some clubs (Nesti, 2010). However, other than Nesti (2010, 2012) few practitioners have written about what this work entailed. Therefore, it is suggested that we do not fully understand the most appropriate, or most effective delivery methods of sports psychology support within youth professional football.

Despite the efforts made by Howard Wilkinson to address and improve TID in youth football, his work has been critiqued. In 2007 Sir Trevor brooking was appointed as the new FA director of football development. He argued that as a governing body the FA did not have sufficient control over the day-to-day operations of football academies or CoE's. Whitehouse (2013) supported this and suggested that football development centers were left unmonitored for too long, consequently the elite standards that the FA strived to achieve were not met. The English premier league became dominated by overseas players, signifying the countries failure to produce top-level talent.

Furthermore, the England senior team failed to qualify for the 2008 European tournament. In January 2010 a group of Premier league academy managers formally met to discuss the systems failings, and how the current youth development pathway could be improved. The result of this consultation process was the EPPP. The next section provides an overview of the EPPP as a youth development framework, and discusses how the EPPP sports science and medicine guidelines informed the objectives of the current thesis.

1.4.2 Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP)

As mentioned above, the EPPP was proposed and accepted by Premier League stakeholders as a youth development structure for English football academies in 2011. The EPPP is a long term development model centered on an ambition for English football to create the world's leading academy development system (The Premier League, 2011). More specifically, the EPPP aims to create football environments that promote excellence, nurture talent, and are successful in transitioning young talent to senior players. It was implemented nationwide by all 72 FL clubs at the start of the 2011/12 season, and is a holistic talent development framework based on 6 fundamental principles. These are as follows; a) increase the number and quality of home grown players gaining professional contracts and playing first team football, b) create more time for players to play and be coached, c) improve coaching provision, d) implement a system of effective measurement and quality assurance, e) positively influence strategic investment into the academy system, f) seek to implement significant gains in every aspect of player development (The Premier League, p.12). As a result of the EPPP implementation it is believed that the FA will attain a better understanding of successful support mechanisms and effective talent development environments.

The EPPP used previous research on TID in elite sport (Bloom, 1985; Cote, 1999) to inform the generation of their own 'Long Term Player Development' (LTPD) model (The Premier League,

2011). The FA's approach to LTPD is based on a four-corner model consisting of technical/tactical, psychological, physiological, and social components (FA game plan, 2010). In support of this model, the EPPP has introduced a comprehensive sports science and medicine strategy to be implemented by clubs. Under previous rules and regulations clubs were only required to employ one chartered physiotherapist to work with young players (The FA, 1997), and there were no requirements for a sport scientist. Furthermore, there were no guidelines in terms of best practice, benchmarking of athletic development, or analysis of the effectiveness of support that was being delivered. The recognition of the role of sports science and medicine by the EPPP is further supported in the EPPP online document (2011). The document describes the sports science and medicine strategy as a holistic movement which aims to create a clear link between the main support specialists (physiology, biomechanics, psychology, performance analysis, strength and conditioning), physiotherapy, and lifestyle management.

Of particular relevance to this thesis is the formal recognition of psychological support within the EPPP framework. In 2011 when the EPPP was introduced there were few guidelines regarding the delivery of psychological support. The EPPP handbook merely stated that an individual should be available to deliver psychological support to players in the form of a psychological screening procedure, and Mental Skills Training (MST) based workshops. Despite the lack of attention afforded to psychology in comparison with the other sports science disciplines this may be viewed as a significant step towards the true acceptance of sports psychology within professional football. Over the last few seasons, the EPPP guidelines have progressed, and now there are clearly defined minimal requirements for the psychological programs delivered in football academies. Psychological development programs should now incorporate the following aspects; psychological testing, lifestyle management, and the delivery of mental skills education such as

imagery, focusing, and stress management. Furthermore, the EPPP has now agreed on appropriate qualifications for the individual employed with the role of delivering psychological support within a football academy. More specifically, individuals are required to possess an MSc in Psychology or Sports psychology, and be registered on either the British Psychology Society (BPS) or British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) pathway to accreditation. The importance of psychology has been further recognised by the developers of coach education courses and CPD events (The FA, 2001). For example, the FA Level 3 Certificate in Coaching Football requires coaches to provide a psychological analysis of players as part of their assessment (The FA website). Despite recent advances, it is suggested that the acceptance and use of sports psychology within professional football is still at an early stage (Nesti, 2012). For example, high profile names who have been employed by top UK clubs with the role of delivering sports psychology are not qualified sports psychologists (The Guardian, 2016), their background is within an alternative domain. This suggests that we do not have a full understanding of how sports psychology may best be delivered within a professional football environment.

Finally, the EPPP has introduced an in depth system of evaluation, involving regular independent audits. This was based on Sir Trevor Brookings suggestions in 2007 regarding the lack of an appropriate monitoring procedure for academy operations. Furthermore, the FA introduced a new classification system for the 72 football academies across England and Wales. There are now 4 categories of academy, and category status is determined by the percentage a club scores on its audit tool as determined by its Independent Standards Organisation (ISO) audit. More specifically, a category 1 club must achieve a score of at least 75%, category 2 clubs must achieve between 65% and 74% on the audit tool. A score of between 50% and 64% is required for category 3 clubs, and category 4 clubs must achieve a score of between 35% and 49%. This is also on the proviso

that in each case clubs comply with the minimum mandatory criteria applicable to the relevant category (Premier League, 2011).

To maintain standards within football clubs a range of evaluation methods have also been implemented. Each academy manager is responsible for conducting an annual self-assessment of the academy which is made available to the FL. The aim of this is to assess the extent to which each club meets and exceeds relevant criteria. The FL also monitors each academy over the duration of a season, and provides the club, the ISO, and the PGB with an annual evaluation. The final method of evaluation is an audit by the ISO every 3 years. Following this, a club's category status is either confirmed or a change recommended. Although a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation procedure has been put into place by the EPPP to measure individual club's effectiveness, there is to date no studies exploring the effectiveness of the EPPP as a talent development framework. More specific to this thesis, there is a lack of research exploring the delivery of sports psychology within the EPPP framework, with respect to both the guidelines for psychological support, the experiences of sports psychology practitioners, and the impact of such work.

A coach education program is delivered alongside the EPPP. This strategy was introduced in 2002 with the aim of improving coaching and playing standards across England (Pain & Harwood, 2004). With relation to this thesis, the FA introduced its 'Psychology for football' strategy as part of coaching education. The psychology strand of the program aimed to increase the awareness and application of sports psychology within professional football clubs at both youth and senior levels (Pain & Harwood, 2004), and involved the launch of sports psychology focused training courses for coaches, parents, sports psychologists, and players. In the years following the introduction of the 'psychology for football strategy' FA coaching courses and awards integrated a more specific

focus on five core psychological characteristics. The characteristics were identified by Harwood (2008) and consisted of; confidence, control, concentration, commitment, and communication. The 5C's as they are known are now embedded within English football academies, and used as a marker of the psychological development of youth level players. To date, only one study (Harwood & Barker, 2008) has explored the integration of the 5C's into a coaching program, leaving a gap in the literature for further examination of how a sports psychologist may work alongside football coaches within this social context.

1.4.3 English Academies Structure

This section aims to provide the reader with an understanding of the youth development pathway for young footballers who enter a football academy. An understanding of the pathway and structure of a professional football academy will be useful for the reader in the consequent chapters of the thesis that discuss both my experiences, and those of the players within the organisation.

Under the EPPP regulations clubs are allowed to recruit players to join their training program from the age of 4. However, a player cannot sign their first contract until the age of 9. It is anticipated that those players who successfully progress from the U5 age group right through to the U23s will accumulate around 8,500 hours of deliberate practice. There are currently 3 stages of development that a youth player will transition through within an English football academy; Foundation Phase (FP), Youth Development Phase (YDP), and the Professional Development Phase (PD). The FP spans from the U9-U12 age group, and within the first development stage players are exposed to up to 5 hours of coaching per week. Aspects of sports science and medicine are delivered during this stage, with a focus on providing players with a strong base to progress to the next stage of development. If a player is successful in attaining a new contract they will transition from the FP into the YDP. The YDP is inclusive of the U13-U16 players, and direct coaching hours' progress

from 5 hours to up to 12 hours per week. During this phase more time is allocated to the sports science and medicine team, and the education staff at a club. As players reach the end of their contract in the U16 age group they will either attain a 2-year scholarship, or be released. Those players who are successful in attaining a youth scholarship enter the PDP. The PDP signifies a number of changes in the development pathway. For example, all players in the PDP are contracted to the club on a full time basis, and receive a wage for their services. Clubs play in a competitive league, and a competitive cup is introduced (FA Youth Cup). During this period, players are exposed to 16 hours of direct coaching per week. In addition to football, all players complete a further education course which is either provided by the club or a local college. Furthermore, players take part in an extensive sports science and medicine program on both an individual and team basis. Upon the end of this scholarship, a player's contract is either terminated, or they are offered their first professional contract. Those players who are successful in attaining a professional contract then transition into the U23 age group (previously U23). The aim of this stage of development is to bridge the gap between a youth scholarship and first team football.

The EPPP has not only marked a number of changes in relation to the daily working practices of staff and players, it has also seen significant changes to the staffing structures in place within football academies. The minimum number of full time and part time staff has increased, and new roles have been introduced. This has resulted in more opportunities for staff from all disciplines within professional football over the previous 5 years. Please see appendix 1 for a staffing structure of a category 2 academy.

1.4.4 Career Transitions

As young players progress through a professional football academy they will inevitably face a number of transitions, some of which are discussed above. For example, the transition from the

YDP to the PDP. Each of these may pose a threat to the psychological development of the individual. Schlossberg (1981, p.5) defined a career transition as “an event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships”. Early research on career transitions in sport focused on the negative experiences of athletes during/after sporting retirement (Haerle, 1975, Mihovilovic, 1968). Two main sociological theories were used as frameworks to understand career transitions (Wylleman, et al., 2004). Social gerontology is the study of the ageing process, and compares the transition out of sport to retirement from the general workforce (Gordon & Lavalley, 2012). However, there is little supporting empirical evidence for the application of social gerontological models to athletic retirement from competitive sport (Mitchell, 2015). Firstly, gerontology has been critiqued for its non-sport character, and therefore does not take into account the unique culture of elite competitive sport. Secondly, retirement from competitive sport may not occur at the same stage in life as retirement from the general workforce. It is suggested that social gerontological models do not consider timing, development, and vocational differences in retirement.

An alternative sociological theory used in early career transition research was thanatology. Thanatology is the study of death and dying (Kubler-Ross, 1969), and has compared forced retirement from sport to a form of social death. More specifically, researchers noted that retirement from sport is an inherently negative event that leads to a loss of functioning and isolation (Werthner & Orlick, 1982; Allison & Meyer, 1988; Grove, Lavalley, and Gordan, 1997). However, the use of thanatology to explain retirement from competitive sport has also been critiqued. Researchers have suggested that retirement from sport is not a singular event, it often has a short-term or long-term impact on the individual, and may not always be negative (Coakley, 1983; Lavalley &

Wylleman, 2000). More recent findings have offered a balanced perspective of career termination, and suggested that for some athletes it may serve as an opportunity for social rebirth, and provide new opportunities for the exploration of different avenues as opposed to social death (Allison & Meyer, 1998; Coakley, 1983; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). However, career retirement is of little value in relation to the current thesis. In contrast, the aim of this thesis is to explore the lived experiences of elite youth footballers as they transition within a professional football academy.

General transition models such as Schlossberg (1981) extended previous models of sporting transition as they focus on change as a process, not just a singular event. These models were developed to explain a variety of transitions that occur in different contexts e.g. changes in relationships, individuals lives, and behaviors. Schlossberg's (1981) model of human adaptation to transition considered 3 main transition factors (a) the characteristics of the individual, (b) the individual's perception, (c) environmental characteristics pre and post transition. However, this model still fails to describe sport specific factors associated with these changes, such as the influence of coaches.

Following on from this, Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) developmental model took into account Bloom's (1985) model on the stages of talent development. They intertwined athletic transitions with athletic, individual, psychosocial and academic dimensions. The top layer represents the transitions that an individual will face in relation to their athletic development, and uses discontinuation to represent an athletes transition out of sport. The second level represents the individual's psychological development occurring during childhood, adolescence, and consequently when an athlete reaches adulthood. The third layer of the model relates to the psychosocial development of an individual as they progress through the other stages of

development. For example, the increasing role of peers as an individual transition's from childhood to adolescence. The final layer reflects an athlete's educational and vocational development (primary school through to vocational training and/or a professional occupation).

This model was the first to describe a holistic approach to career transitions, and appears to give the most complete picture of the transitions that athletes experience from entrance into sport to sporting retirement (Morris, 2013). Wylleman and Lavalley (2004) model was supported by researchers as it takes into account the range of transitions across an athlete's life. For example, when athletes move from childhood to adolescence this may coincide with the transition from primary education to high school, and a change in the psychosocial development where the athlete may start to value peer's opinion to a greater level than their parents. However, the model has been critiqued as it fails to take into account the non-normative transitions that athletes face during their sporting career e.g. injury, and it is not sport specific. It is suggested that Wylleman and Lavalley (2004) model is not applicable in its current state to all sports, for example mastery occurs at a much earlier stage in gymnastics than it would in football. Furthermore, according to Wylleman and Lavalley. (2004) transitions occur during a specific and limited period of time. However, Lavalley (2000) critiqued this, and noted that retirement from sport is often recognised and occurs over a period of time, therefore it may be better described as a process. Finally, although a number of transitions are presented in the model the varying demands of each transition is not considered. Therefore, it is difficult to provide athletes with appropriate resources to assist them through specific transitions (Morris, 2013).

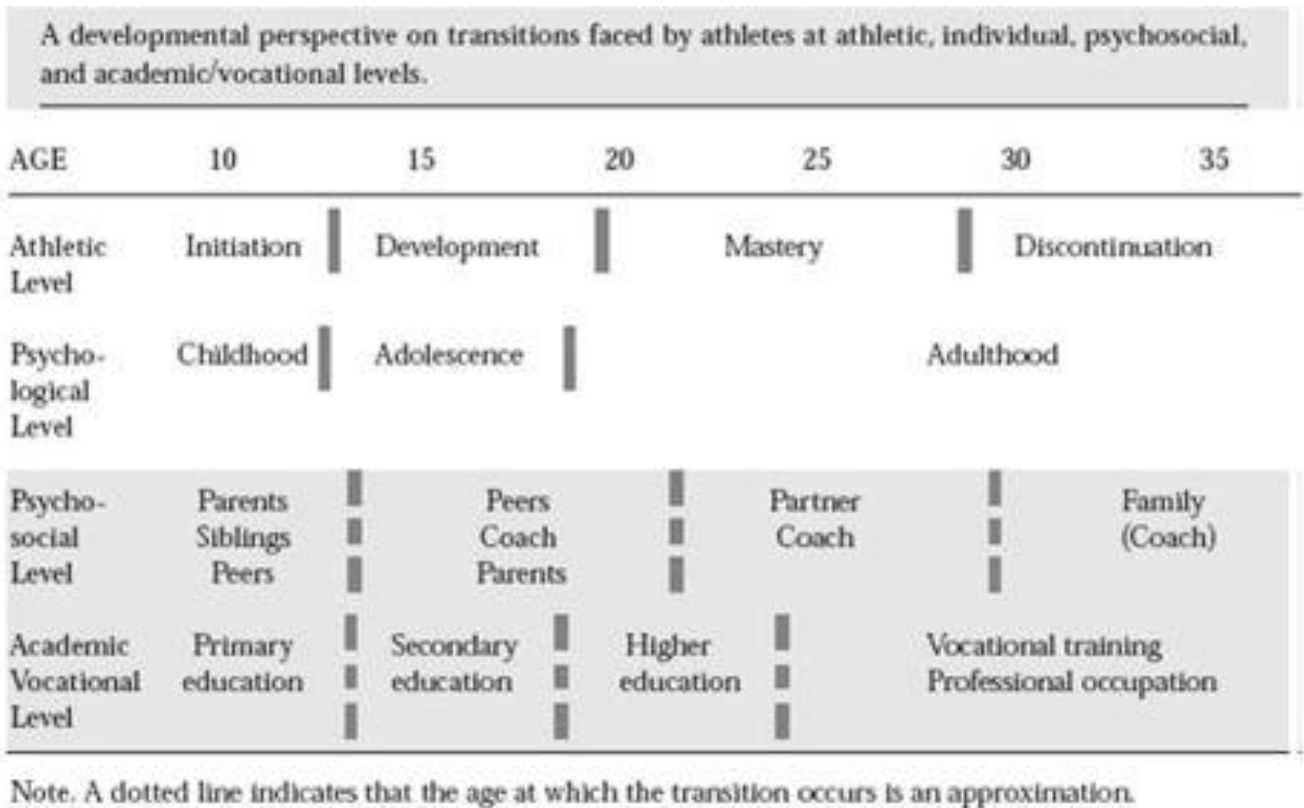


Figure 1. Developmental model of career transitions on an athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic/vocational level (Adapted from Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004, p.8)

1.4.5 Within-Career Transitions

Much of the early research into career transitions has been critiqued, due to its narrow focus on athletic retirement and normative transitions. The most current research in the area of transitions has focused on within career transitions and critical moments (Mitchell, 2015; Nesti, 2012; Pummell *et al.*, 2008). Pummell *et al.* (2008) presented a model of career transition pertaining to the youth to senior change in 10 young event riders. More specifically, this focused on the transition from club to regional level. Five categories were identified as determining whether a career transition was successful; (1) motivation for the transition, (2) perceptions of the transition, (3) sources of stress, (4) support for athletic development, and (5) post transition changes.

However, Morris (2013) critiqued Pummell *et al.*'s. (2008) work, firstly they suggested that it does not fully explain the process of transition, and secondly it has not been published in peer review publications, raising further questions of its quality.

Specific to the context of professional football, Reeves *et al.* (2010) built upon Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) and presented a model of career transitions. They identified the need for a critical post academy phase (ages 18 to 20) where players are yet to step up to the first team, but having attained professional contracts are no longer part of the academy set up. The authors suggested that young players are often not adequately prepared for this element of their career, where social support is diminished, and they are often the least valued members of the stage of the organisation that they enter. Reeves *et al.*'s (2010) model has close relevance to the objectives of this thesis. A number of the players whose experiences are highlighted in the consequent chapters fall into the 'critical post academy phase'. However, in contrast to Reeves *et al.* (2010) this study used a longitudinal case study perspective. The current thesis builds upon the work of Reeves *et al.* (2010), and explores the application of the model within professional football following the introduction of the EPPP.

As noted by Littlewood and Nesti (2011) much of the career transition literature to date has focused on normative transitions such as the youth to senior transition, and sporting retirement. This has generally painted a picture of transitions being smooth, well thought out, and distant events. However, non-normative transitions are generally unanticipated, and involuntary events that do not occur in a set plan or schedule, but are the result of important events that take place in an individual's life which they must respond to (Littlewood & Nesti, 2011). Examples of this include injuries, a change in coach, transfer from one team to another, and de-selections. Nesti *et al.* (2012) suggested that a more useful and dramatic phrase that could be used to describe these situations

are ‘critical moments’. More specifically, Littlewood and Nesti (2011) described them as “the frequently experienced moments in our lives where we must confront the anxiety associated with an important change in our identity” (p.23) These moments may be positive or negative, for example winning a cup competition, or having your contract terminated unexpectedly (Littlewood & Nesti, 2011). Nesti (2012) further identified that critical moments may be small or large events, but will inevitably have an impact on a person’s sense of self. Ultimately, a critical moment will depend on the subjective experience of an individual, invoke an emotional response, and be dependent on timing (Nesti et al., 2012, p.25). Other than Nesti *et al.* (2012), and O’Halloran *et al.* (2012) few researchers have explored the application of the term ‘critical moments’ to the experiences of footballers within the professional football environment. More specifically, the identification and discussion of a number of critical moments experienced by players at youth level would further our understanding of the challenges that youth footballers face psychologically, and how sports psychology may be best used to support these individuals.

1.4.6 Psychological Challenges Faced by Youth Footballers

So far, we have reviewed literature on youth development models that have been applied to both a general sporting, and more specific professional football context. From this, it has been suggested that young footballers will face a number of transitions as they progress within a football academy, and therefore may encounter a range of negative and positive situations a number of times across one season and many times during their careers (Nesti *et al.* 2012). These challenges may be personal and interpersonal, (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006) and have a consequent effect on development. Further to this, the literature discussed earlier in the thesis supports the notion that developing professional footballers is a complex process.

Researchers have explored stressors, youth to senior transitions, and coping strategies with academy players (Reeves *et al.* 2010, Mills *et al.* 2012; Finn & McKenna, 2010). Reeves *et al.* (2010) adopted Lazarus (1999) transactional perspective of stress and coping as it places a focus on the environment in which an individual is positioned. More specifically, the transactional perspective views stress and coping as an ongoing dynamic process that involves the individual transacting with their environment, making appraisals of situations, and attempting to cope. Coping research such as Compas *et al.* (2001) accepts that coping mechanisms change from childhood to adolescence, and from adolescence to adulthood, based on an individual's life experiences and psychological development. Given Compas's research it is suggested that the stressors experienced by players, and the coping mechanisms they employ may change during the different stages of soccer development. Reeves *et al.* (2009) found that in early adolescence the most commonly reported stressors were; making errors, opposition stressors, team performance stressors, and family stressors. In middle adolescents there were more stressors reported than in early adolescents, and those most frequently reported included; making errors, team performance, coaches, contractual stressors, and playing at a higher level. It is important to note here that the above research focused on stressors experienced during football matches, and therefore only recognises pitch based player needs. Nesti *et al.* (2012) took a broader perspective on the stressors faced by professional footballers, and suggested that the most common psychological challenges were; injury, de-selection, falling out with the manager, problems with motivation, financial matters, competitive and existential anxiety, knowing and dealing with expectations, and knowing your role and responsibilities on the field of play. However, this research included adult professional players that may be at a different stage of their life to the younger academy players explored in this thesis. Beyond, pitch based stressors it is important to consider the role of culture

in shaping young player's experiences and psychological development. This will be further discussed in the next section of the literature review.

In order to successfully cope with the challenges that they may face it is suggested that young players would benefit from psychological support. Wylleman *et al.* (2004), and Reeves *et al.* (2009) supported this, and recommended that a support network should be put in place to ensure that within career transitions are made as smoothly as possible. The current thesis aims to extend previous work on the delivery of psychological support within professional football to address the psychological challenges that youth players experience in the YD, and PDP of professional football academies.

1.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL CULTURE

The following section of the literature review explores the social context of professional football, specifically in relation to English football academies. The author describes and critiques the cultural characteristics of professional football clubs, and discusses some of the potential psychological implications of this environment on the development of youth players. Furthermore, cultural implications are considered in relation to applied sports psychology practitioners who operate within professional football clubs.

1.5.1 Social Context

Before describing some of the cultural characteristics of professional football, it is first important to inform the reader what we mean by the term culture. Jones (2010) defined organisational culture as the shared set of values, norms, and beliefs that control and influence how members interact with individuals from both within and outside of an organisation (p.179). For example, a football club may display its logo or motto around their training ground as a symbol of culture (Mitchell,

2015). Nesti (2010) built upon this, and suggested that “culture refers to more than just explicit processes, operational mechanisms, and daily practices” (p.1). Rather, there are more subtle factors such as unwritten rules and traditions that have an impact on the working environment (Nesti, 2010). In this thesis we refer to culture as incorporating the components identified by both Jones (2010) and Nesti (2010).

Many researchers from the fields of psychology and sociology have passed comment on the cultural characteristics of professional football organisations (Mitchell, 2015). However, there is a lack of research from sports psychology practitioners who have actually explored this social context from within a football organisation (Nesti, 2010; Platts, 2012). This may be attributed to the limited access professional football clubs afford to outsiders, and the dominance of inappropriate research methodology to date (e.g., questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews). As a consequence, it is suggested that we do not have a full understanding of how professional football cultures influence the actions of both staff and players. Mitchell (2015) supported this, and noted that we have a limited understanding of the daily activities, and cultural norms of youth academy footballers. In the earlier sections of the literature review the important role of the environment in facilitating talent development was identified, and therefore a more comprehensive understanding of how the social context of professional football influences the development of young players would be a beneficial addition to the current literature base. The current thesis builds upon previous research by Parker (1996) and Roderick (2003), and adds the perspective of an applied sports psychology practitioner who was embedded within the academy of a professional football club over a longitudinal time frame.

Traditionally, professional football has its roots in working class communities (Richardson *et al.*, 2004). This has remained the case despite the global economic growth of the game, and the

abolishment of the maximum wage in 1961 (Parker, 1996, p.1). In order for us to better understand English professional football as a working class occupational domain (Parker, 1996), it is important to consider working communities in late Victorian England (Carter, 2004). During this period, professional football players were not granted the same status that they possess today. Rather, they were considered as equivalent to industry workers (Carter, 2006), and were therefore seen as requiring control, restriction, and regulation (Kelly & Waddington, 2006). Factory managers employed autocratic and authoritarian styles of management, and the power hierarchy between employer and employee was made explicit (Carter, 2006; Platts, 2012). Kelly and Waddington (2006) explored the use of abuse and intimidation as characteristics of football management, and suggested that the aim of this was to make sure that all players knew their place within the organisation. Football managers were offered a huge amount of power in defining and acting out their role, and few constraints were placed on either them or their support staff (Kelly, 2008). A further example of this is the title of the managerial role used by those within an organisation to refer to the first team manager. In English football traditionally managers are referred to as 'gaffers'. The term gaffer was originally used to describe the leader of a factory, and further demonstrates the clear hierarchical difference in professional football between the manager and his employees (the players). Finally, the notions of masculinity and toughness that run through the culture further demonstrate football's working class roots (Parker, 1996; Platts, 2012; Willis, 2009). This will be further discussed later in the section in the context of traditional management styles, and banter.

It is understood that diversity will exist between clubs, and each organisation will possess its own unique features, however there are common environmental characteristics found in most clubs, particularly within an English context (McDougall *et al.*, 2017; Nesti, 2010). Professional football

clubs have been described as total institutions by Gearing (1999). Based on Goffman's (1959) work, he suggested that they are "unique organisations that encourage the development of certain characteristics in young footballers as they transition through adolescence and into adulthood" (p.48). The notion of football clubs as total institutions was made because of the club's ability to structure the day-to-day lives of individuals who operate within it. As suggested by Mitchell (2015) this may be through the travel, training, and competitive patterns of players who are under the guidance of their manager, and support staff. In relation to other total institutions Gearing (1999) compared professional football clubs with the military, or prisons, which are enclosed to outsiders, and controlled with masculinity and aggression. It is suggested that this environment will influence the lives of those individuals who operate within it, for example, players, coaches, and support staff. As a result of this, an understanding of some of the sub-cultural characteristics and normal working practices of professional football clubs may help the reader better relate to the content of the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

Despite significant changes over the last 30 years in ticket sales, sponsorship, public relations, and other aspects of professional football as a sport (Kelly & Waddington 2006, p.158), researchers have suggested that the professional football culture has remained reluctant to change (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Nesti, 2010, 2014; Parker, 1996). Parker (1996) conducted an ethnography from within a professional football club, and highlighted the masculinity of the culture. He described it as "a breadwinner/manual production mentality, and a coarse sexist humor manufactured around practical jokes, gestures, and racist/homophobic connotation" (p.223). Richardson *et al.* (2004) supported this and suggested that the professional football culture is an aggressive and masculine one where players are driven to hide their feelings and encouraged to display macho behaviors. Researchers have further suggested that a player must fit within this culture if they want to be

successful within a professional football club (Mitchell, 2014; Nesti, 2010) Therefore, players may conform to cultural norms even if they don't agree with or feel comfortable in carrying out these behaviors. Examples may include male dominated activities such as drinking, smoking, and promiscuity (Parker, 2001, p.64). It is suggested that beyond other sporting environments, the professional football culture poses a number of potential psychological challenges for those players that exist within it, especially when traditionally they are encouraged to hide their true feelings (Richardson et al., 2004). Therefore, players may often be positioned where they want to remain a part of the team but they are not being true to their values, and beliefs. A more in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by modern youth players would facilitate a better understanding of how sports psychology practitioners may best support youth development in this unique environment.

Further to the above description of the working class roots and masculinity of professional football clubs, previous research has illuminated the influence of sub-cultural characteristics on the behaviors and actions of staff and players. For example, access, management style, and banter. Each of these will be discussed in more detail below.

Access

Professional football clubs are enclosed worlds who do not easily accept the introduction of outsiders (Littlewood, et al., 2014). Limited access is generally afforded to researchers, the media, and the public. Tomlinson (1983) suggested that this might be attributed to the high guard, and suspicion of any individual whose interests may lie outside of the club itself. This has been a hurdle for researchers to overcome when attempting to conduct their research within these environments (Littlewood *et al.*, 2005). For example, Parker (1998) noted that it took him nearly a year to gain entry into the organisation. This has resulted in few studies that have actually explored the working

practices of professional football from the position of ‘insider’ (Nesti, 2010). Of those research studies and media programs that do exist, many focus on managerial styles of the drama of being a professional footballer. In contrast, they do not explore the daily challenges and experiences of players. Researchers (e.g., Parker, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2002; Roderick, 2006) have described professional football careers as short, insecure, and under constant scrutiny. When we consider the difficulties faced by outsiders, and particularly academics with regard to entering professional football environments, the methodology used in the current thesis adds novel and original features to current sports psychology research in professional football. In comparison with other ethnographies that have been conducted in this social context, the current thesis was conducted over a considerably longer period of time. For example, Cushion (2001) conducted his research during one full season where the author acted as a coach and explored coaching behaviors. In contrast, this thesis was conducted over a 3-year time frame during which time the author was fully immersed in the club as a sports psychology practitioner-researcher. Secondly, the research was conducted by a female researcher, as previously noted research in this field is saturated with male perspectives (e.g., Nesti, 2010; Parker, 1995; Roderick, 2006).

Management Style

The second sub-cultural characteristic of professional football environments continues on from the working class traditions, and refers to the authoritarian style of management. Platts (2012) suggested that the autocratic and authoritarian styles of management displayed by English coaches is not limited to the EPL, rather it runs through all levels of professional football. Ternent and Livesey (2004) explored managerial perceptions of management styles with the aim of developing a better understanding of what managers perceived to be important for them to be successful. From their findings, they suggested that coaches believed it was essential to impose structure, order, and

rules. Roderick (2006) suggested managers are generally the most powerful individuals at any professional football club, and by denying players access to key resources such as contract extensions they can retain a high level of control over their players. This may be further extended to those players that managers no longer value as a member of the team. Roderick (2006) stated that players may be frozen out, and ultimately rejected altogether. Examples of this in practice stem from research findings, autobiographical accounts of ex professional footballers, and media coverage (Platts, 2012). Cushion and Jones (2006) explored the communication styles between a youth team coach and his players following a competitive game. They reported that language was aggressive, abusive, berating, and dictating, and that players were not given the opportunity to explain their actions (p.149). The language used by managers supports previous descriptions of football cultures where managers have the power to act without restriction. Parker (1996) reported similar findings within an academy team; he noted that the use of singling out and humiliating individuals was a way of controlling the young players. In his autobiography, Roy Keane recalled one of his experiences of being on the receiving end of this harsh management style. He writes about an incident that occurred with Brian Clough in the changing rooms following a mistake that he made in the FA cup. He stated “when I walked into the dressing room after the game, Clough punched me straight in the face. Don’t pass the ball back to the goalkeeper he screamed as I lay on the floor, him standing over me” (Keane, 2003, p.28).

A further method through which managers were able to demonstrate their power and authority over players within youth and senior set-ups is through systematic chore and fine systems. Previous football researchers have referred to this as the ‘hidden curriculum’ employed within the game (Cushion & Jones, 2012). The aim of the hidden curriculum was for players to become socialized into accepting the values, belief system, and identity of the wider organisation (Platts, 2012).

Parker (1996) spoke about the apprentices in his study regularly being required to undertake a range of low grade jobs as part of their daily routine. Examples of this included cleaning boots, balls, and cones (Parker, 1996, p.40). Individuals who questioned their chores were often fined, physically punished, or dropped from the weekend squad. Further to this, Kelly and Waddington (2006) suggested that players are exposed to an institutionalized fine system on a daily basis if they are perceived to have breached one of the club rules decided upon by the manager (p.41). Kelly and Waddington (2006) further suggested that managers used the fine system as a way of impacting players where it was most meaningful, money. Further to this, the willingness of players to participate in extracurricular chores, and those who attain the least fines are generally identified by managers as possessing a 'good attitude' (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.* 2000). These players would consequently be rewarded with roles such as the captain or vice-captain.

In summary, it is suggested that the traditional management style that has been described and reviewed may influence the healthy psychological development of academy footballers, and count for some of the most challenging experiences that they encounter. For example, a players personal and professional identity might be threatened during each conflict with their manager, and if not successfully resolved this could influence a player's long term psychological development. In line with the first objective of the thesis (*to deepen the current understanding on how applied sports psychology practitioners may best operate within the unique culture of professional football*) the authoritarian management style displayed might inform the subsequent design of the psychological development program to be delivered within the professional football club. More specifically, supporting the players to cope with managerial demands might result in a smoother and more successful transition through a professional football club.

Banter

Continuing on from the sub-cultural descriptions highlighted in the literature review so far, it is important to discuss the interactions between individuals within football clubs, as these will inevitably influence a person's experiences, and may impact behavior (Roderick, 2006). Stemming from the traditional working class culture, and masculinity of the organisations comes a "stylized adoption of a sexually explicit and often derogatory vocabulary which was ideally characterized by a sharp pointed form of delivery" (Parker, 1996, p.223). Researchers have used the term 'banter' to refer to this, and it often involves a type of humor directed at or about another individual within the organisation e.g. teammates (Parker, 1996; Platts, 2012). The aim of these wind-ups is generally to identify those who fail to cope and eventually 'lose their head'. Collinson (1988) stated that although traditionally banter comprises of light-hearted jokes, in certain situations it might have a deeper meaning. Researchers have supported this, and suggested that generally within the context of professional football, banter is used as a vehicle for the older, more experienced players to demonstrate the hierarchical structure within a club to the younger players (Kelly & Waddington, 2006). Secondly, it is a method to socialize younger players into the environment in which they will need to be able to survive if they are to have a successful career in professional football (Kelly & Waddington, 2006). Gearing (1999) suggested that the implications of the football culture might be to delay or prevent a healthy psychological transition from adolescence to adulthood. Although previous research has explored the psychological stressors that youth footballers face during a match situation (Sagar, et al., 2010), there is a clear gap in the literature for a study that explores how the broader culture of a professional football club may impact the psychological development, and more specifically the identity of these players. Henrikson *et al.* (2010) emphasized the importance of the macro and micro environment on the development of

talented athletes, and the need to look beyond the individual influence and at a more holistic approach. Identity is chosen as a central focus, previous research (Mitchell, 2015; Nesti & Littlewood, 2010) has highlighted the importance of a clear sense of self for the successful navigation through challenging situations.

1.5.1 Implications of Culture for Sports psychologists

Having described the culture, and some of the potential implications of this on the behaviors of football managers and their players, it is important to consider the cultural influence on the daily operations of sports psychologists. This may help us to better understand how practitioners can operate more effectively. It is suggested that some of the cultural characteristics described above may have implications for the working practices and experiences of support staff, yet this has been little researched within the current applied sports psychology literature. However, Nesti (2010) and others who have engaged in applied work have passed comment. In his book ‘psychology in football’, Nesti (2010) wrote about the need for the sports psychologist to establish a full understanding of the social context in which they operate, and without this very little could be achieved. He went on to say that given the fast paced, ruthless, and results-oriented environment of professional football, those sports psychologists employed in this environment may well have their contracts terminated if they cannot display their ability to read and operate functionally within the culture. Researchers have found that the cultural characteristics of professional football clubs have resulted in players and staff demonstrating a reluctance to show their feelings (Parker, 1996; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006). Therefore, in this environment it is suggested that a sports psychologist may find it more difficult to operate, especially given the caring nature of the discipline. Sports psychologists are often employed to support, and guide individuals in their psychological development (Sullivan & Nashman, 1998). This is a very different role to a strength

and conditioning coach for example, who is tasked with making players physically stronger. Nesti (2010) therefore noted that sports psychology might be viewed as feminine and weak. However, the opportunity to take part in the masculine banter, and dish out as good as received may go some way in reducing the negative stereotype. This highlights the important need for sports psychologists to be aware of the negative and unprofessional aspects of the social context in order to do their job effectively. A first step in doing so would be to attain buy in from key stakeholders such as the 1st team captain and manager.

There is a clear lack of published articles from female sports psychology practitioners reflecting on their experiences of working in professional football. Although research exploring the perceptions and challenges faced by sports psychologists working in other sports has been explored, this has not been conducted within a UK setting. Female sports psychologists may face a different set of challenges to male practitioners who operate within the game (Nesti, 2010), especially those who did not play the game and therefore enter unaware of some of the characteristics previously described. In contrast to this, Nesti (2010) suggested that in some contexts, the female sports psychologist might actually have an advantage, in that she is delivering a service that is traditionally seen as feminine. He supported this by suggesting that some female practitioners have been well accepted especially when delivering their role in youth settings under the remit of education and welfare officer.

However, research conducted by Roper (2008) with a group of female sports psychologists in the US did not support Nesti's (2010) indications. Roper (2008) identified several barriers that women may face when entering the applied domain; a) entrance into applied sports psychology, b) women's status in applied sports psychology, c) gender discrimination, d) gaining access, e) family and balance. These barriers indicate that there are a number of difficulties for the female sports

psychologist to overcome, both before they enter the domain and during their work. Roper (2008) further suggested that these difficulties may be exaggerated for those practitioners working in male dominated sports. Despite the benefits of Roper's research, it is suggested that these findings may not be transferrable to UK settings due to differences in the sport itself, and the fact that most of the participants were attached to collegiate sports teams as opposed to professional sport environments.

1.6 PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

The following segment of the literature review explores the evolvement and integration of sports psychology within the context of professional football. Firstly, a review of current literature on key stakeholder's perceptions of sports psychology within the game is conducted, followed by a discussion and critique of challenges that applied practitioners may encounter. In accordance with the introduction of the EPPP, the increasing opportunities for sports psychologists to deliver their work within football academies is reviewed, and considered in relation to the current thesis.

1.6.1 Integration of sports psychology

Although increasing numbers of sports psychologists have been working in professional sport since the early 2000's, it is suggested that sports psychology has not always been well received at an elite level (Nesti, 2010). Given this suggestion, it is surprising that so few studies have explored the perceptions of those working within professional sport on sports psychology topics (Sullivan & Hodge, 1991; Martin *et al.*, 2001).

The earliest research of this kind was conducted by Silva (1984) with high school and college coaches across the US. Silva (1984) concluded that sports psychology was perceived as a hindrance to a coaches training program, resulting in limited opportunities for sports psychologists

to work with athletes in this environment. In the decade that followed, several researchers (Partington & Orlick, 1987; Ravizza, 1988, 1990) further explored the state of sports psychology in sports clubs and organisations, and highlighted a lack of understanding of sports psychology concepts. More closely aligned to this thesis, Kremer & Marchant (2002) reflected on the misconceptions of sports psychology in Australian Football. They suggested that coaches lacked an understanding of the discipline; believed that sports psychology was a topic too complex for players to understand; and viewed sports psychology as a quick fix solution to problems. Although this study was conducted within a football context, it is questionable whether the findings are generalizable to professional football in the UK. For example, Cushion (2001) noted that the culture of professional football within England is unique. Therefore, we may expect different findings to similar studies conducted in other countries. Pain & Harwood (2004) explored academy directors, national coaches, and academy coaches' perceptions of sports psychology in England. Their results both supported, and extended previous findings. Coaches demonstrated a lack of understanding and lack of knowledge of sports psychology as a discipline (p.4). In line with this, the coaches only saw value of sports psychology for those players with 'issues'. Furthermore, they suggested that the title 'sports psychologist' did not fit with the traditional values and beliefs of the culture, and that an alternative title would be more facilitative in encouraging staff and player receptiveness. In 2011, Johnson, Andersson, and Fallby built on Pain & Harwood's (2004) study and explored coach's perceptions of sports psychology in the context of Swedish professional football. They suggested that coaches lacked an understanding of sports psychology topics, and shared the view that sports psychology was common sense.

Although both studies provided a valuable insight into the perceptions of sports psychology within professional football, they can also be critiqued as neither study attained the perspective of players,

sports psychologists, or the other support staff in the professional club's studied. There is a clear lack of research on the perception of sports psychology in professional football from applied practitioners working within this sport. Nesti (2010) reflected on his experiences of working as a sports psychologist within professional football, and suggested that staff often view sports psychology as feminine and weak. The implications of this for the sports psychologist can be particularly damaging when we consider the traditional masculine culture of the game (Parker, 1996). In addition to this, the studies discussed above were all conducted before the introduction of the EPPP. It is suggested that the EPPP may have implications for the perceptions, and role of sports psychology within professional football clubs, especially given that it is now considered a compulsory component of player development.

Despite advancements in the field of sports psychology over the past 15 years, there is still a skepticism regarding the positive effects of sports psychology services (Johnson, Andersson, Fallby, 2011). This may be attributed to the individual who is responsible for the delivery of sports psychology support, their delivery content, and/or delivery style not being coherent with the culture of the professional football club. When sports psychology was emerging as a discipline, the field was saturated with practitioners teaching mental skills to athletes with the aim of improving performance (Chandler, et al., 2014). Corlett (1996) used Sophistry from ancient Greece as a metaphor for the use of mental skills training. The term 'sophistry' was used to describe those individuals who employ tricks and tools to improve athletic performance e.g., visualization. Further to this, sophists deliver cognitive and somatic intervention techniques to deal with the symptoms of a problem. However, the use of mental skills training in sport has been critiqued by a number of sports psychology researchers (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Nesti, 2004; 2010; 2012; Ravizza, 2002). The first critique refers to athletes becoming reliant on the

recall of a taught mental skill when they are faced by a potentially problematic situation (Corlett, 1996). Nesti (2004) offered a further critique, and suggested that in reaching elite level in their chosen sport athletes will often already possess excellent mental skills. Given this, the sports psychologist may have little role to play in the delivery of mental skills to overcome potential challenges. Finally, Nesti (2004, 2010, 2012) highlighted the broad scope of challenges that an athlete may face during their careers, and that not all of these stressors may be performance based, meaning that something more is needed.

However, in the last decade applied sports psychology has broadened to encompass more humanistic, person-centered approaches based in counselling psychology (Hack, 2005). Corlett (1996) used the term Socrates to refer to this alternative perspective on the delivery of sports psychology services (Corlett, 1996). Although mental skills training has dominated much of the research within sports psychology, Corlett (1996) and others have highlighted the use of counselling methods to deepen an athlete's self-knowledge. In contrast to the suggestions of cognitive-behavioral psychologists, Corlett (1996) suggested that a lack of self-knowledge may be the origin of a number of the issues an athlete experiences, as opposed to a deficiency in mental skills. For example, in professional football an athlete may face anxiety regarding the termination of their contract at the end of a season, and therefore something more is needed (Nesti, 2004). Counselling interventions do not focus on providing the athletes with an immediate means to performance enhancement. On the other hand, they create short term discomfort for the client, while encouraging them to deal with the root cause of an issue. Vealey (1988) supported this, and found that a holistic philosophy focusing on personal development added an important new approach for sports psychologists. Closely related to this Nesti (2004) indicated that much of the skepticism that sports psychologists have faced within professional football to date may be

attributed to the over delivery of MST (Nesti, 2004). In the earlier sections of the literature review it is identified that the organisational culture of professional football clubs may be the root cause of some of the challenging experiences that young players face, and an approach to sports psychology support that takes this into account may lead to more effective sports psychology practice (Mitchell *et al.*, 2014). However, the use of counselling methods in sports psychology has also been criticized. Sports psychologists have questioned the use of counselling approaches for those clients who require short term interventions with immediate results (Corlett, 1996). Furthermore, the application of counselling methods with young athletes has also been questioned (Nesti, 2004).

It can be suggested that there is a lack of research on the integration of sports psychology within professional football, particularly from within a British football context. Furthermore, there have been no studies exploring the role, or effectiveness of sports psychology in professional football since the introduction of the EPPP. As previously noted, this youth development framework formalized the delivery of sports psychology in professional football. Consequently, it is expected that there will be an influence of the EPPP on the viewpoint and role of sports psychology across a range of key stakeholders within professional football clubs. To address the deficiency in knowledge, the current thesis attains the views of players, coaches, and parents within a professional football academy over a longitudinal time frame to deepen our understanding of how sports psychology may best be integrated within professional football.

The perceptions of sports psychology within professional football may pose a number of barriers or organisational challenges for the sports psychologist to overcome, both before entrance to the organisation, and once they are employed. This section places a focus on those barriers that a sports psychologist may face once they have attained entry to the setting, as the current thesis was

conducted following a 6-month placement with the club. Much of the previous research within this area has explored barriers to the discipline in low level or non-professional sport settings (Nesti, 2004). McDougall *et al.* (2017) critiqued this and suggested that despite there being some similarity in the challenges that practitioners face across sporting levels; the magnitude, range, and complexity of these challenges may be very different. For example, professional sport is a result driven industry with substantial rewards for success, and no place for failure (Cruickshank, Collins, & Minten 2013; Nesti, 2010). Therefore, the vocational security of the sports psychologist working in elite sport is likely very different to their counterpart operating at a recreational level.

Although not specific to professional football, McDougall and colleagues (2015) identified the following potential barriers; a) the need to build and establish respect, b) ethical challenges and confidentiality, c) interdepartmental conflict, d) cultural demands, e) role clarity, and f) demonstrating effectiveness. With relation to barrier (a), Nesti (2010) emphasized the importance of developing a strong working relationship with the manager/head coach if the sports psychologist wants to be accepted and taken seriously. It was further suggested that buy in from these stakeholders may go a long way in helping individuals be more receptive to other aspects of sports psychology delivery (Nesti, 2010; Pain & Harwood, 2004).

With regards to ethical issues and confidentiality, several researchers (McDougall *et al.*, 2017; Nesti, 2004, 2010, 2012; Pain & Harwood, 2004) have supported these as a barrier to sports psychology practice. Anderson (2005) suggested that confidentiality is a pre-requisite for all sports psychologists to adhere to when working with a client of any sporting level, both in team and individual sports. However, Gould *et al.* (1991) suggested that in order for confidentiality to be employed effectively, there is a need for support and buy in from coaches. Pain and Harwood (2004) supported Gould *et al.*'s. (1991) research, and suggested that confidentiality was a

significant barrier to the acceptance and integration of sports psychology within professional football clubs. Coaches expressed that they neither understood nor saw the importance of confidentiality. However, academy directors did acknowledge the importance of confidentiality in encouraging the players to open up to the sports psychologist. This aspect of the results was supported by both Andersen (2005), and Nesti and Littlewood (2010) who suggested that confidentiality is essential for clients to feel both safe and secure in disclosing information, but for this to be effective, there needs to be a trust between the sports psychologist and the manager/coach. However, Pain & Harwood's (2004) study did not directly explore confidentiality in professional football, and there is a clear lack of further research exploring this complex topic. This may be due to the difficulty sports psychologists face in gaining long term, sustained access to a club (Nesti and Littlewood, 2010). In summary, it is suggested that confidentiality remains a difficult issue for sports psychologists working within professional football, and further research is needed to understand how sports psychologists can adhere to the ethical standards of professional bodies (e.g., BASES, and BPS) whilst also maintaining a strong relationship with a coach or manager.

The third and fourth barriers identified by McDougall, Nesti, and Richardson (2015) were interdepartmental conflicts, and cultural demands. These may better fit within the broader term 'organisational challenges'. Fletcher *et al* (2011) explored the frequency of organisational stressors experienced by those working in professional sport. He identified; workload, role ambiguity, lack of social support, job insecurity, and culture/political environment as the five most commonly reported stressors. However, Fletcher *et al* (2011) did not explore the importance nor impact of these stressors on daily working practices. Other than the work of Nesti (2010), few researchers have addressed this topic. This may be attributed to those sports psychology practitioners who are

working in professional football clubs not being directly linked with academia, and therefore not publishing their experiences in journal articles. The final barrier was the need for the sports psychologist to demonstrate their effectiveness. McDougall *et al.* (2017) suggested that inevitably a sports psychologist would be judged on the performance of athletes, and the results of a team. However, it is also important for the sports psychologist to take the responsibility for measuring, documenting, and demonstrating the effectiveness of their work in other ways (Mahoney, et al., 2002). The importance of this may be enhanced in professional football where vocational insecurity is greater.

The above research can be critiqued, as it is limited to a small number of studies, conducted by male researchers. Given Roper's (2008) research which highlighted some of the unique challenges that female sports psychologists may face when working in sport in the US, it is suggested that further enquiry is required to develop an understanding of the organisational challenges that a female sports psychology practitioner may face when operating within the unique culture of professional football.

Historically, the use of sports psychologists within English professional football has been limited (Larsen, 2013). For example, during the 2002-2003 season only 5 English Premier League clubs employed a sports psychology consultant on a contractual basis (Andy Cale, FA Education Advisor). In contrast to this, Pain *et al.* (2002) found that 65% of professional football academies surveyed in their study had used a sports psychologist. However, the extent of the sports psychologist's involvement is not known. The general reluctance and skepticism towards the inclusion of sports psychology in professional football (Johnson *et al.*, 2010; Nesti, 2010) is surprising when we consider the importance placed by coaches on the psychological characteristics of youth footballers. For example, Gilbourne & Richardson (2006) suggested that youth football

coaches often discuss psychological factors as distinguishing those players who will or won't make it in the game. However, it seems that until now this association had not translated to the employment of sports psychologists in youth academies (Heaney, 2006; Moran, 2002; Pain *et al.*, 2002; Reilly & Gilbourne, 2003).

The introduction of the EPPP in 2011 opened the door for sports psychologists aspiring to work within professional football. More sports psychologists are being employed on a full-time or part-time basis with the role of delivering psychological support to youth players. In some cases, Premier League clubs now have one or more sports psychologist operating at each phase of the youth development set up (FP, YDP PDP). This is a significant development when we consider the stats offered by Cale in the early 2000's. The level of sports psychology support delivered within English academies is only expected to increase over the next few years (Nesti, 2014). Consequently, it is anticipated that more practitioners will join the sport and deliver psychological support at youth levels. Furthermore, the EPPP is continually evolving, and over the last 5 years there have been significant alterations to the requirements of the psychological content delivered. Sports psychology, and broader sports science disciplines are developing into an integral component of all youth set-ups. This was exemplified in December 2016, when the British Association of Sport and Exercise Scientists (BASES) announced a new partnership with the English Premier League. The aim of this is to further support the delivery of sports science and medicine disciplines across clubs in the Football League. BASES is the accreditation body for sport and exercise scientists in the United Kingdom, and therefore this partnership should encourage the development of a model of best practice for all clubs with relation to the delivery of sports science support.

However, to date there have been no published studies exploring the relevance and effectiveness of the psychological component of the EPPP in supporting youth level players. Given the increasing opportunities for sports psychology practitioners to operate in this environment, it is crucial that we understand what comprises effective practice. There are a number of reasons behind this; firstly, if sports psychology practitioners want to have a successful long term career working in professional football it is essential that their practice not only meets the requirements of the EPPP, but also supports the needs of the club. Secondly, effective sports psychology practice is integral to the psychological development of players that exist within this social context.

1.6.2 Evaluating Consultancy Services

The evaluation of sports psychology services has received considerable attention in the literature (Chandler, 2014). Evaluation plays an important role in sports psychology practice for a number of reasons; improving effectiveness, reflecting on the learning process, and supporting evidence towards the value of their role (Anderson, et al., 2004). In 1987, Partington & Orlick developed the Sports psychology Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF) as a method for sports psychologists to monitor and improve their service delivery. However, quantitative questionnaires have been critiqued due to the limitations of attaining an in-depth perspective. Researchers have suggested that it is not only important for practitioners themselves to evaluate their work, clients can also provide valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the consultancy (Anderson *et al.*, 2004). The current thesis extends literature on the effectiveness of sports psychology services, and provides a multi-method in-depth evaluation of the delivery of a psychological development program delivered over a longitudinal time frame within a professional football club.

1.6.3 Sports psychology Education and Training

In a British context, the term ‘psychologist’ is governed by law, and is typically used to represent those individuals educated within mainstream psychology, and certified to address psychological issues (Hack, 2005; McCullagh & Noble, 2002). More specifically, for those individuals who aspire to deliver psychological services within a sporting context there are two education/ training routes. The first of which is delivered by the British Psychological Society (BPS), and the second via the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES). Accreditation through the BPS pathway allows for registration with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and therefore these practitioners are eligible to use the title ‘Sports psychologist’, whereas BASES is not endorsed by the HCPC and therefore practitioners must use an alternative title.

1.6.4 Practitioner Development

In the last decade there has been an increased focus on the training and development experiences of sports psychologists (Andersen et al., 1997; Williams & Scherzer, 2003), and trainee practitioner’s reflections on their early career experiences (Collins *et al.*, 2013; Lindsay *et al.*, 2007; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008). The aim of this has been to increase other neophyte consultant’s awareness of the experiences they may face as they transition into work in a sporting context. Tod (2007) highlighted the benefit of this for neophyte and experienced practitioners, and sports psychology training routes in adequately preparing practitioners for effective practice. Tod further suggested in his 2007, and 2010 research that given the similarities between counselling and applied sports psychology (Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999), that counselor development theory may be applied as a framework to represent practitioner training and growth. More specifically, Ronnestad and Skovholt’s (2003) counselor development model addressed the development of practitioners over a lifespan perspective following formal

education. Researchers have noted the transferability of this model to a sports psychology training context based on practitioner reflections (Tod & Bond, 2010). The model identified six phases of development; (1) Lay Helpers, (2) Beginning Students, (3) Advanced Students, (4) Novice Professionals, (5) Experienced Professionals, and (6) Senior Professionals.

Lay helpers have no training in counselling but help friends and family informally. They generally identify problems quickly, and support is based on personal experience as opposed to theoretical knowledge. The second phase of development (beginning students) signifies the start of professional training, and can be a difficult time for individuals. During this phase, trainee practitioners often face the realization that they need to adopt new counselling perspectives, experience self-doubt and anxiety regarding their competence, and rely heavily on their teachers and/or supervisor's guidance. Following phase 2, individuals progress into the advanced student phase. This is characterized by the application of rigid interventions based on external sources of knowledge. Individuals start to become more critical of their practice, feel full responsibility for the outcomes of interventions, and are vulnerable to feedback from supervisors. During the novice professionals stage (phase 4) individuals have finished their formal training, often feel unprepared for their role, and struggle with the transition to not being supervised. Finally, they develop an increased focus on personal characteristics and the importance of establishing a working relationship with their client. Following this, experienced professionals feel more authentic when interacting with their clients, and therefore are more flexible in tailoring their intervention to the client's needs.

Tod, Andersen & Marchant (2009) have supported Ronnestad & Skovholt's (2003) model when exploring the development of Australian applied sports psychology students. Furthermore, there is a clear link between Ronnestad & Skovholt's (2003) model and other published articles on

neophyte practitioner's development journeys (Lindsay *et al.* 2007). Most research on the development of sports psychology trainees has been cross-sectional (Tod & Bond, 2010), or only explored development over a short period of time. Of the research that has been longitudinal, data has often been collected using interviews as opposed to practitioner's reflections on their development. For example, Tod *et al.*, (2011) explored 7 consultant's development journeys over a period of four years following their postgraduate training, and accounts were again congruent with the counsellor development theory. The current thesis extends knowledge in the area of practitioner development, and places a specific focus on how the authors experiences shaped and developed her professional identity.

1.7 IDENTITY PERSPECTIVES

This section aims to explore current approaches to understanding identity, inclusive of; athletic identity, social/role identity, Erikson's psychosocial identity model, and identity capital. The use of these models is discussed in relation to both the development of elite young footballers, and sports psychology practitioners. This area of the literature review provides context for objective 3 (*to explore the perceptions of players and practitioners within a professional football club on the psychological development of youth team players at distinctive phases of the football career*) and objective 5 (*to capture the impact of a trainee applied sports psychology practitioners experiences of working within professional football on practitioner identity and professional development over a longitudinal time frame*) of the thesis, and builds upon sections previously outlined.

1.7.1 Defining identity

The definition of identity perhaps depends upon the domain from which the individual originates. With relation to this thesis, the author uses the term identity as a means of understanding

individuality or the ‘self’ (Archer, 1994; Kroger, 1993; Lapsley & Power, 1988). More specifically, identity is a social psychological construct based on what is important to the self, and to others. The importance of social influences on the self-construction of identity is determined through imitation, and cognitive operations, which direct attention, filter and process information, and consequently select appropriate behaviors. Identity has a number of functions. For example, Adams (1996, p.433) identified the five most commonly documented as: (1) providing the structure for an individual to understand who they are; (2) providing an individual with meaning through commitments, values, and goals; (3) providing an individual with free will; (4) allowing for consistency, coherence, and harmony between values, beliefs and commitments; (5) enabling the recognition of potential by giving the individual a sense of future, possibilities, and alternative choices.

1.7.2 Athletic Identity

Within the field of sports psychology, athletic identity has been the most commonly explored concept. Researchers have defined athletic identity in a number of ways. For example, Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder (1993, p.237) suggested that “athletic identity is the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role, and looks to others for acknowledgement of that role”. Building on this, it is suggested that all current definitions of athletic identity include the following; (a) the exclusivity of an individual’s identification with the athlete role (Good *et al.* 1993, p.2); (b) the degree of individual identification with the athlete role (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993, p.237); and (c) the degree to which the athlete identifies with the athletic role (Hurst, Hale, & Smith 2000, p.432). Each of these notions will strongly influence how an individual perceives themselves. For example, a young individual may describe themselves as being a ‘footballer’. However, they may be yet to attain their first professional contract, and have ignored the other

aspects of their life, such as their role as a son, or brother. Athletic identity is most commonly measured using Brewer & Cornelius's (2001) Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS). The higher the score on the AIMS scale, the stronger an individual's level of athletic identity, and the more they view themselves as an athlete in their chosen sporting context.

Sports psychology researchers have used the AIMS scale to explore the influence of athletic identity on level of athletic performance, and psychological well-being. Findings have suggested that a strong and exclusive athletic identity may have a positive effect on athletic performance (Horton & Mack, 2000; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Early support was provided by Good *et al.*, (1983), and Matheson *et al.*, (1994) who found that student athletes identified more with their role as an athlete as their level of sporting achievement increased. More recently, Lamont-Mills and Christensen (2006) explored athletes who competed at various sporting levels (elite, recreational, non-participation), and supported previous results. Individuals who competed at higher levels scored higher on the AIMS scale.

Psychological benefits have been identified for those individuals whose athletic identity is strong, but not exclusive to their athletic role. Examples include, increased motivation, more positive sporting experiences, and a higher level of social interaction (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). However, there is also a wealth of literature on the potential negative physical and psychological consequences for those athletes who over identify with their athletic role. Danish (1983) identified that given the relationship between athletic identity and increased performance levels, the demands of elite level competition and training may require individuals to narrow their identity and focus on their chosen sport in order to succeed. However, this may lead to athletes who are one dimensional (Werthner & Orlick, 1986), and have restricted the development of other equally important roles within oneself (Wiechman & Williams, 1997). Research has found that this poses

a number of potential challenges for the individual e.g., overtraining, anxiety, drug abuse, and social issues (Coen & Ogles, 1993; Horton & Mack, 2000). Furthermore, Marcia (1966) reported that individuals who exclusively identify with their role as an athlete may find career transitions such as de-selection, and the transition out of sport more problematic (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993), due to a reluctance to explore education, career, and social avenues. This may be attributed to the athlete viewing other aspects of their life as a threat to their athletic identity, and detrimental to their sporting performance (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Good *et al.*, 1993; Petitpas, 1978). Finally, having a strong athletic identity may negatively influence an athlete's ability to cope with challenging situations during their sporting career (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Brewer *et al.*, 1993). Werthner and Orlick (1986) explored the retirement experiences of former Olympic Canadian athletes, and results suggested that over three quarters of participants found retirement difficult, and 32% described retirement as traumatic. This was supported by Lavallee & Robinson (2007) who found that a number of gymnasts in their study had a strong athletic identity or foreclosed identity, and therefore strongly perceived themselves as a 'gymnast' as opposed to 'someone who does gymnastics'.

1.7.3 Social and Role Identity

In the literature identity has been explored in a number of different ways, inclusive of; personal, social, role, and implicit identities (Burke, 2001; Freeman, 2003; Hetts, Sukana & Pelham, 1999; Kitayama & Uchida, 2003). In line with the objectives of the thesis, this section explores social identity theory with relation to youth level footballers, and trainee sports psychology practitioners operating within sports organisations.

Social identity theory originally developed as a theory about intergroup relations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), but has since been applied to group processes in organisations (Hogg, 2001). Tajfel's (1978,

1981, 1982) early research suggested that social identities emerge from an individual's identification with a group (e.g., professional sport, political group, religion) or social category (e.g., race, gender) relevant to themselves. Essentially, social identity theory refers to an individual's knowledge that they belong to a specific social group that has a valuable and emotional significance to them (Tajfel 1982, p.292). These identities are created by the individual through a process of self- stereotyping. More specifically, one will assume the characteristics of their group's stereotype. For example, a professional footballer may act in line with the traditional values and beliefs of the culture in order to gain the acceptance of their teammates. Social identity theory would further suggest that group members are naturally configured to maximize the proportion of within, and between group differences within a particular comparison context, meaning that individuals are motivated to facilitate a positive identity for their chosen group (Hogg, 2006; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Mitchell, 2015). Hogg, Terry & White (1995) suggested that people may identify with a number of groups (e.g., their professional organisation, a local sports team, and a group of friends), and that the importance of each one in the overall self-concept varies depending upon the attractiveness of that group (Kelman, 1958). Researchers have suggested that when an individual is assigned to and identifies with a group, two processes occur; (a) they search for the meaning of the group by making comparisons between their in-group and relevant out-groups (e.g., understand what it means to be an academy footballer as opposed to a recreational player); (b) they seek to define their group more favorably on valued dimensions, by positive distinction from other groups (e.g., academy footballers are more talented, and more committed than recreational footballers). In summary, it is suggested that the social identity theory involves four key processes; (1) self-categorization, (2) depersonalization, (3) prototypicality, and (4) positive distinctiveness. Social identity theory offers a new perspective to the current literature,

and is used as a framework to better understand the identities of young football players attempting to navigate their journey, and 'fit in' within the unique world of professional football and its unique culture.

Role identity refers to how we identify with the role that we perform within a group or organisation (Burke & Reitzes, 1981), and the self is viewed as a product of social integrations (Mead, 1934). It is suggested that all social institutions are hierarchically structured, whether this is the family or a global business (Parsons, 1951; Parsons & Bales, 1955), and statuses are the positions held by individuals within the structure of these social institutions. The status held by an individual will determine their behaviors and roles, subsequently we tend to view ourselves as possessing the characteristics of the roles we perform. Serpe (1987) and others who support social and role identity perspectives highlight the impact of social networks on people's self-concept. This may have particular application to professional football players, as their role identity may develop as the individual progresses within the hierarchical structure of a professional football club.

On the other hand, researchers have critiqued social identity theory for emphasizing the fluidity of identity dependent on social context (Huddy, 2001). Researchers have found that in some contexts identity is to an extent fixed. For example, young academy footballers are often molded into what is viewed by the club as an acceptable way of being early on in their careers, and this may stay with them throughout their career despite changing social situations (Brown & Potrac, 2009; McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006). Examples of this include those players who have struggled to cope with threats to their identity such as injury, de-selection, and retirement.

1.7.4 Erikson's Approach to Identity

Erik Erikson (1968) offered a further perspective on the notion of identity. His model was derived from traditional psychological roots, but has been largely overlooked in current sports psychology literature due to the dominance of cognitive behavioral approaches (Nesti, 2004, 2007). Erikson's (1968) model adds a useful perspective in understanding the development of athletic identity (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001). Erikson viewed identity as a fluid and transitional phenomena. However, he offered a lifelong perspective characterized by a series of crises and resolutions that may have positive and negative influences on our sense of self. Erikson believed that an individual's identity was somewhat fixed, however if a healthy sense of self is evident that an individual would successfully cope with life's challenges. The stages of Erikson's (1968) model are as follows:

Stage 1. Infancy (Birth to 18 months). During this stage the conflict is trust vs mistrust, and relates to feeding. The outcome of this crisis is for children to develop a sense of trust stemming from caregivers who provide reliability, care, and affection. However, a lack of this support will lead to mistrust. Stage 2. Early Childhood (2 – 3 years). The second conflict is autonomy vs shame and doubt, and occurs during toilet training. During this stage, children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills, and feel a sense of independence. Success will lead to feelings of autonomy, whereas failure may result in shame and doubt. The third stage is Preschool (3 – 5 years). During this stage the conflict is to initiative vs guilt during exploration. Children need to begin asserting control and power over their environment. Success will lead to an individual who develops a sense of purpose, whereas children who are over dominant may experience disapproval, resulting in a sense of guilt. Stage 4. School age (6 – 11 years). During this stage industry vs inferiority is the conflict to be resolved, and relates to school experiences. Children need to cope

with new social and academic demands. Here, success will lead to a sense of competence, whereas failure may result in feelings of inferiority.

The fifth stage symbolizes the transition into adolescence (12 – 18 years). The conflict during this stage is identity vs role confusion with regards to social relationships. The outcome is for teenagers to develop a sense of self and their own personal identity. Success may lead the individual to an ability to be authentic, whereas failure leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self. Stage 6. Young adulthood (19 – 40 years), symbolizes a conflict of intimacy vs isolation. The outcome is for young adults to form loving, intimate relationships with other people. Success leads to strong future relationships, whereas failure may result in loneliness and isolation. The 7th stage is Middle adulthood (40 to 65 years), where the conflict is generativity vs stagnation regarding work and parenthood. During this stage, adults need to create, or nurture things that will outlast them e.g., having children. Success may lead to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, whereas failure may result in a shallow involvement in the world. The final stage, Maturity (65 to death) symbolizes the final conflict, ego integrity vs despair. This stage involves a reflection on one's life, it is suggested that older adults need to look back on their life and feel a sense of fulfilment. Success at this stage leads to feelings of wisdom. Whereas failure results in regret, bitterness, and despair.

Recently, researchers (Mitchell et al., 2014; Nesti & Littlewood, 2011) have supported the link between the work of Erikson (1968) and the development experiences of youth footballers. Mitchell et al. (2014) suggested that given the range of critical moments, or crises experienced by young footballers e.g. de-selection, Erikson's work provides a fitting theoretical standpoint. Mitchell (2015) identified the fourth and fifth stages of psychosocial development as having close synergy with the experiences of youth footballers. For example, during the crisis of industry vs

inferiority coaches and parents will praise the person's ability as a footballer, consequently this will form the initial foundations of who they perceive themselves as, and who they become. The fifth stage, identity vs role confusion poses a further challenge for young footballers. Kroger (1996) suggested that this is the phase of development where individuals start to form a sense of self, based on their life experiences to date, biological maturity, and social expectations. However, youth footballers may not have had the opportunity to experience a range of life experiences as a result of the long term, intense, and demanding training and competition schedules that they are exposed to from as young as 8 years of age (The FA, 2010). Therefore, it is suggested that these individuals may develop a foreclosed identity. Marcia (1966) suggested that this might occur when an individual makes a premature commitment to an occupation or ideology. Although it may have short-term benefits, for example dedication, individuals are likely to struggle to cope with external challenges such as injury. The notion of a foreclosed identity may help to explain some of athlete's negative experiences regarding career transitions and retirement (Horton & Mack, 2000).

1.7.5 Identity Capital

The identity capital model (ICM) is a social-psychological approach to identity that explores how individuals can strategically manage the different aspects of their lives to effectively function in their education, work, and personal lives (Côte et al. 2016). The model originated from the authors experiences of moving through various cultural contexts, and from a working class to middle class community. From a psychological perspective, the ICM uses aspects of Erikson's developmental approach to identity formation (e.g., Erikson, 1968), and sociologically the ICM makes reference to symbolic interactionist models of identity management techniques in the presentation of self (Côte, 2016, p.5). The ICM is directed at western societies, and assumes that traditional normative structures have diminished; therefore, the life course of people has become more individualized

(p.4). In line with this, individuals need to make their own decisions, and take active, and strategic approaches to personal development, in order to find a community with which they ‘fit’ (Lewis, 2016).

Côte’s ideas regarding identity align with Eastern and Buddhist perspectives that identity is an illusion. In other words, researchers from this approach suggest that our identity is comparable to a box of tools. Each of these tools is a resource that an individual can employ depending on the social context they find themselves in. Research suggests that the more valuable resources that an individual can employ, the easier it is for them to successfully navigate their way through situations (Wortham, 2006). These resources may be sociological (tangible), and psychological (intangible) (Côte, 2016). Tangible resources are demonstrated through an individual’s behaviors and possessions and include; social class, gender, ethnicity, and qualifications. Whereas intangible resources refer to psychological components such as, ego strengths, locus of control, self-esteem, and sense of purpose in life (Côte, 2016).

The ICM measures resources using the Multi-Measure Agentic Personality Scale (MAPS), and the Identity Stage Resolution Index (ISRI). MAPS was derived by Côte in 1997, with the aim of measuring intangible identity capital resources, and is based on a 6-point scale constituting 96 items. However, this scale was critiqued for being too large for participants to answer, and therefore in 2008 the scale was reduced to 20 items. Although Côte *et al.* (2016) supported the use of the MAPS20, other studies such as Atak *et al.* (2013) have critiqued it due to the difficulty of assessing the reliability of short scales. The ISRI was developed as an additional scale to measure the accumulation of identity capital during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The ISRI is a scale measuring six items on a scale of 1 to 5. Research exploring a range of college students

from different cultural backgrounds (Berzonsky, et al., 2013) supported the use of the ISRI as a measurement of identity capital acquisition.

The ICM has been used in nursing and education to explore the development of professional identity (Goldie, 2012). Professional identity has been defined by researchers as an individual's professional self-concept based on their attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1978; Slay & Smith, 2011). In modern societies professional identities are an increasingly desirable label, due to a need to feel valued. For example, Hall and Burns (2009) explored professional identity development in doctoral students, and found that students who understood, and were able to negotiate and acquire identity capital were more likely to benefit from their student experience. Furthermore, they suggested that the identity capital that individuals had developed was used to attain important opportunities and increase future employability. However, this study did not explore the transition from the participant's role as doctoral student to a working environment.

It is suggested that the ICM may also provide a framework for sports psychology practitioners to explore their development of a professional identity. To date, there are only a small number of published articles exploring professional identity within the field of sports psychology. This is surprising when we consider the increasing number of reflective publications from sports psychology practitioners on their consulting experiences (Collins et al., 2013; Holt & Streat, 2001; Lindsay et al., 2007). Many of these allude to identity, without placing it as a central focus point. Similar to the findings in other occupational domains, Williams and Andersen (2012) suggested that neophyte sports psychologists may face a number of threats to their identities as practitioners. Their paper explored the experiences of a neophyte sports psychology practitioner in the two years leading up to an Olympic games. ICM was used as a framework to better understand why the

author acted in the way he did in a range of different situations. However, identity was one of three main focuses within the paper, and therefore it is suggested that a deeper exploration focusing solely on identity would be a beneficial addition to the field.

1.8 CLARIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH AIMS AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This research has two overriding research aims, and a number of inter-related objectives (outlined in the introduction). The first aim of the thesis is to critically explore the authors journey as a neophyte sports psychology practitioner working within elite youth professional football. Secondly, the thesis aims to illuminate the lived experiences of young professional football players and challenges to their identity over a longitudinal time frame.

The next chapter is an empirical chapter detailing the research methodology, and reflecting on the process of conducting a practitioner-researcher ethnography. Chapter 3 details the journey of the author, and discusses the impact of critical moments on the development of her identity. Following on from this, chapter 4. explores the lived experiences of youth player's within the professional football culture, and the impact of these on identity, behavior, and development. Chapter 5 outlines the design, implementation, and evaluation of the psychological development program across the three seasons. The final chapter concludes the thesis, and outlines some of the practical implications of the study, and avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION AND DEFINING ETHNOGRAPHY

The previous chapter introduced the current thesis, and reviewed relevant literature in relation to the objectives of the research project. The following chapter starts by explaining the rationale for the use of ethnography in addressing the research objectives, and further outlines the research paradigm, research process, implications, analysis, and ethical and moral dilemmas of the chosen methodology.

Ethnography has its roots in the social anthropologies of the early 20th century. These typically set out to explore the culture of social environments that are far removed from the researchers own (Atkinson, et al., 1999). However, ethnography has more recently been used in education (Corrigan, 1979; Fleming, 1995; Lacey, 1970; Willis, 2000), nursing (Henderson & Vesperi, 1995; Roper & Shapira, 1999; Smyth & Holmes, 2005), and sport (Adler & Adler, 1991; Bowles, 2014; Cushion, 2006; DeRond, 2008; Parker, 1996). Over the last 30-years ethnography has moved from a marginal place in social science research to a more central position (Hammersley, 1992), and consequently more ethnographic research projects are being accepted for publication. The use of ethnography in sport has been supported by recommendations from researchers on the need to move away from conventional research methods, and towards the use of alternative methods to facilitate a greater understanding of individual and cultural difference (Biddle *et al.*, 2001; Krane & Baird, 2005). Ethnography aims to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller and more meaningful context (Tedlock, 2000). More specifically, ethnography refers to the practical steps researchers take to collect data from natural, real world settings via the position of an involved actor, and aims to reconstruct the participants own view of everyday life (Rock, 2007).

It is concerned with experience as it is lived, felt, or undergone. Ethnography is inductive, does not engage assumptions of value free or neutral observations, is historically situated and situationally bound, and realizes the influence of the researcher on the research (Hammersley & Atknison, 1995). Wolcott (1994) further suggested that for an ethnographic inquiry to be classed as a ‘true ethnography’, culture must be at the heart of the ethnographer’s task. In summary, ethnography allows us to get close to the action, immerse ourselves in the setting and take into account the many things that may be going on (Maitland, 2012).

The steps to ethnography involve; gaining access, finding a role, establishing relationships, and attaining information by a variety of means and from a number of sources. These sources shed light on the lives and life worlds of a particular group of individuals (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Once access is gained, ethnography enables the researcher to get behind the cultural practice as an insider, and observe the daily working practices of an organisation over a prolonged period of time. This is often several months, but can take place over a number of years (Krane & Baird, 2005). Ethnographers employ multiple methods, such as participant observation and interviewing to record the meaning that individuals attach to these everyday activities (Krane & Baird, 2005). This time spent in the field allows the ethnographer to see, hear, feel, and experience the daily life of the participants in their natural setting. The above description defines ethnography in relation to the researcher’s relationship with the research context. However, discussions on what the term ethnography denotes stretches far beyond what happens in the field. In the final stage, the ethnographer must leave the research field and begin to reconstruct aspects of the cultural scene they have become familiar with, from the position of outsider looking in (Bowles, 2014). The process of writing is considered a key part of the ethnographic approach. Writing of ethnographic text conjoins emic perspectives with the rhetorical and creative devices used in their analysis and

representation (Arnould, 1998). In other words, ethnography is a process of conducting research that results in a textual product. During the write up phase of the study, the researcher remains a part of the research environment. Practical guidelines introducing the concept of ethnography provide a myriad of perspectives from which ethnography can be understood and applied across the social sciences (Brewer, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Sparkes, 2002; Van Maanen, 1995). Van Maanen (1988, p.15) suggested “minimally, I now think that discussions of ethnography should explicitly consider; (1) the assumed relationship between culture and behavior (the observed); (2) the experiences of the fieldworker (the observer); (3) the representational style selected to join the observer and the observed (the tale); and (4) the role of the reader engaged in the active reconstruction of the tale (the audience).”

2.1.1 Rationale

Ethnography was deemed the most appropriate method to address the objectives of this research. The aim of the ethnography was to allow for an in-depth, cultural analysis of the integration of sports psychology within an elite level professional football clubs academy, and critically reflect on my journey as a practitioner-researcher in developing and delivering a psychological development program. The ethnography enabled me to take up a dual role of practitioner-researcher, embedded within the culture of which I was studying. This was a key feature of the study, as I was at the heart of the research rather than the periphery. It is suggested that this insider role has two key benefits. Firstly, I was able to get closer to the setting than using any other approach (Tedlock, 2000). The insider’s perspective would be instrumental in helping me to understand and describe situations, and understand why people think and act in the ways that they do. Secondly, and more specific to sports psychology, Krane & Baird (2005) highlighted the benefits of a research method where the researcher is embedded within an organisation. They

suggested that ethnography allows us to truly hear the voices of coaches, athletes, and practitioners, and therefore will deepen our understanding of their experiences. This justifies studying organisations up close, to observe how actors make sense of their social actions (Morrill & Fine, 1997). However, the challenge for the researcher here is how to make sense of, and create meaning in this world. Chia (2003) highlighted the importance of language in creating and understanding meaning, and suggested that a clear focus should be placed on observing and listening to individual meanings and intentions before we interpret. Wittgenstein (1953) supported this, and believed that we cannot learn a language or understand their speak unless we take part in the form of life in which the language is used. Therefore, by spending a prolonged period of time within an organisation the researcher becomes “saturated with firsthand knowledge of the setting” (Morrill & Fine, 1997, p.435). This has particular relevance for the current thesis given the culturally endemic feature of language and banter in professional football, which often outsiders may fail to understand or recognise (Parker, 1995).

Ethnography can be used to achieve a systematic interpretation of the daily working practices for those the ethnographer chooses to observe. Interpretation is fundamental within this research, as the end goal is to interpret and create meaning of the experiences of organisational members. Within a social constructionist paradigm (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) meaning is derived from interpretation, and knowledge is only significant in so far as it is meaningful, therefore ethnography as a research method lends itself to understanding uniqueness as well as frequent behavior. The research process of ethnography is a tool where meaning is created in itself. Everything, including the product of the research is a point for consideration; in place of assuming that readers will make the same sense of the text that the ethnographer has when writing the text, reading becomes an active process of sense making (Maitland 2012). For this study, the

construction of meaning is accessed through observing and listening to what is done and not done, what is said and not said, and what happens and doesn't happen.

The multi-method approach of ethnography is appropriate for achieving the research objectives. Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) suggested that to rely on what people say about their beliefs and actions without also observing would be to neglect the complex relationship between attitudes and behavior, just as to rely on observation without also talking to people to attain their perspectives would lead to a risk of misinterpretation. A further benefit of using ethnography is the data analysis. Quantitative data analysis assumes that individuals' actions are the mechanical products of psychological and social factors, and therefore ignores the creative role of individual thoughts and group interaction. Further to this, quantitative analysis neglects the processes by which social phenomena develop and changes (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994).

Despite the benefits of using ethnography outlined above, choosing this method to obtain a rich and contextualized understanding of a situation is not unproblematic (Hammersley, 2006). Concerns with the method relate to reflexivity, representation, impartiality, and validity, and will be discussed later on in this chapter. In summary, it is important to note that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). No method can deliver on ultimate truth, or grasp all of the subtle variations that occur in human reality. However, it can be suggested that some methods are more appropriate than others when conducting research of this type (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In the early stages of the research proposal, the use of an alternative research method was discussed with my supervisors. Initially, action research (Brydon-Miller *et al.*, 2003) was considered as it is a structured and systematic procedure that would still have allowed me to occupy the dual role of a practitioner-researcher within the organisation of study. Further to this, the action research cycle

(O'Brien, 1998) is a process that results in change or action. Although this links closely with the aim of Chapter 5, it was decided that action research was not the most appropriate method to address the broader aim of the thesis (to extend our holistic understanding of the professional football culture and its impact on those who exist within it). It is hoped that by reading this thesis researchers will better understand the professional football culture, and consequently be in a stronger position to use action research methods.

2.1.2 Research Paradigm

Since Khun (1970), those involved in social science research have placed a greater focus on the notion of paradigms in their work (Schempp & Choi, 1994). Despite this, although many sports psychology researchers have described in detail the methods used in their research, they have rarely explained the underlying basis for the choice of methods and analytical strategies (Bowles, 2014). For example, researchers have used ethnography as a research method from very different standpoints. However, this may be attributed to the understanding that the concept of a research paradigm is a far from straightforward issue, and the term itself has been used in a number of ways (Cushion, 2001). Guba & Lincoln (1989) have used the term paradigm to refer to a belief system that enables one to see and make sense of the social world. Sparkes (1992) further developed this and suggested that the values and assumptions of each paradigm are learned and developed via the process of socialization. A key part of this socialization process is the taking on of certain assumptions regarding questions of ontology and epistemology (Sparkes, 1992). More specifically, ontology refers to questions regarding the nature of existence. It is suggested that researchers are fronted with a basic ontological question “whether ‘reality’ is of an objective nature, or the product of individual cognition; whether ‘reality’ is out there in the world or the product of one’s mind” (Burrell & Morgan, p.3, cited in Sparkes, 1992). Closely linked with the

issue of ontology, is that of epistemology. Denzin & Lincoln (1994, 2005) suggest that epistemology refers to questions about the nature of knowledge, and the relationship between the inquirer and the known. Our epistemological assumptions as researchers determine the issue of whether knowledge is something that can be acquired, or has to be personally experienced (Cushion, 2001). In summary, a research paradigm guides and shapes how a researcher formulates questions and selects appropriate methodologies (Schemmp & Choi, 1994). How a researcher answers questions regarding ontology, epistemology, and methodology will inform how the others are addressed later in the chapter.

Despite the shifting nature of paradigms, it is argued that three central paradigms distinguish research in the sport setting (Carr & Kemmis, 1986); empirical analytical science (positivism), interpretive sciences (constructivism), and critical sciences. Despite this, new paradigms have been introduced in critique of the paradigms that previously existed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hammersley, 1992). The purpose of this thesis was to attain a greater understanding within a social context. Therefore, this research is firmly placed within a social constructionist, interpretive paradigm. Interpretivism has adopted an ideographic approach to research, and therefore makes use of qualitative research methods (Cushion, 2001). The methodological research process was defined by a relativist ontology, a subjectivist epistemology, and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures. More specifically, a relativist ontology related to the belief that there are multiple social realities, and the interpretation of stimuli guides actions. A subjective epistemology believes that knowledge is created through interaction, and therefore there is a need to understand that social interaction and the everyday patterns of communication, as they create, sustain, and modify social rules and meaning (Cornbleth, 1990). The naturalistic set of

methodological procedures mean that the methodology occurs in the natural world of the participants.

It is accepted that the researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework, and a set of questions they hope to answer, which are then examined in specific ways. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) would suggest that there is an intimate and inseparable relationship between the socially constructed nature of reality, the researcher, what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. However, Hammersley (1996) argued against this and suggested that epistemology and method are not interrelated, and reject the notion that paradigm influences the choice of methods. He further suggested that research does not fall neatly into one or another belief system, rather that multiple methodological dimensions involve a range of positions. Although some authors have supported this (Bryman, 1988), other researchers have argued that it is an overly simplistic approach that glosses over important issues (Henwood, 1996). Lincoln & Guba (2000) contend that qualitative and quantitative research methods can be used appropriately within any research paradigm. It can be concluded that fundamentally, the researcher's basic assumptions regarding the nature of reality, truth, and the social world infuse all aspects of the investigative process (Earls, 1986). Van Maanen (1988) supported this and suggested that researchers may use the same methods but from a very different epistemological perspective.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is suggested that staff, players, organisations, and cultures are not separate concrete entities, but are inextricably linked and relationally defined organisms that are historically shaped in the process of becoming. Therefore, a temporal study of the relationships between these stakeholders and the environment within which they conduct those relationships is required (Maitland 2012). Throughout the thesis the first person is used. The aim of this is to evoke an emotional response from the reader by creating an intimate connection between themselves and

the author. I delved deeper than the surface to construct a rich description that would contribute to the progression of knowledge and understanding. In other words, this approach would facilitate the illumination of the little known, and little understood world of working within professional football, and deepen our understanding of the complexities of being a female embedded within a male dominated sport. The approach used is summarized by Wolcott (1990), who suggested that the meaning of this research is to seek an understanding of the social world that we are continuously in the process of constructing.

2.2 ACCESS

In contrast with other authors writing about their experiences within professional football (Cushion, 2001; Parker 1996), my access to the club was relatively unscathed. Prior to the beginning of this research project I had spent 6 months observing the culture of Burrington City FC as part of an MSc placement. After I had completed my 6-month placement, I approached the gatekeeper to the research with the idea that by progressing my work into a full time PhD research project I could continue my personal development, and also satisfy the needs of the club by helping them to meet the requirements of the EPPP. Burrington City FC supported the idea, and it was agreed that I would spend the next 3 years working with the club's academy players as a practitioner-researcher. In the initial instance, I was confident in the role and looked forward to the next 3 years. This was perhaps because I was familiar with the environment, and believed that sports psychology would be a valuable addition to their youth development framework. In addition to this, after seeing the lack of opportunities elsewhere, I was both relieved and grateful to have secured my short-term future in something that would hopefully be beneficial long-term.

2.2.1 Setting and Participants

Burrington City FC is a medium sized football club that has been in existence for over 100 years. Like many other clubs, Burrington City FC has seen better days financially and remains reliant on the academy set up to survive. Despite this, the club is still one of the 92 UK teams currently in the English Football League. The club takes great pride in the academy set up and its record of producing players that go on to play at the highest level. The introduction of the EPPP in 2011 meant that Burrington City FC employed a number of additional academy staff to ensure a good academy status. At the start of the research project, the club had over 150 players in the academy system (U9-U23), some of which are employed within the Professional Development Phase (PDP), and others in the Youth Development Phase (YDP), and Foundation Phase (FP). In order to adequately support all players in the academy set up, Burrington City FC employ a number of full time staff (see Appendix 1. Staff Model). All players within both the academy, and 1st team at Burrington City FC are based at the same training complex. This is something that is very different to most other professional football clubs, where there is a clear separation between the 1st team and the academy, for example different training grounds, staff, and training times. The participants in this research were based on meeting one of the following criteria. Firstly, that they played for Burrington City FC's academy within the age groups U13-U23. Secondly, they were a parent/guardian of a Burrington City FC academy player in the U13-U16 age groups. Finally, they were a full time member of academy staff. The rationale behind this is discussed in chapter 5 of the thesis.

2.3 PRACTITIONER- RESEARCHER ROLE

The traditional model of research creates a clear division between the researcher, and the practitioner. Bensimon *et al.* (2004) suggested that in traditional research, the researcher identifies

the problem to be studied, selects the appropriate methods, collects and interprets the data, and reports the findings. The researcher is viewed as the expert, and therefore they are given the authority to provide solutions. Despite much of this research being conducted, it has little influence on the actions of practitioners, who rarely access or use the research findings. The more traditional research method better lends itself to quantitative research that mimics the scientific approach (Bensimon *et al.*, 2004). More recently, practitioner-researcher approaches have become more accepted within social sciences (Krane & Baird, 2005). Practitioner-research was defined by McLeod (1999) as research carried out by practitioners for the purpose of advancing their own practice and advancing the understanding of the social world in which the research was conducted. Over the duration of the PhD research project I occupied a dual role as a full time practitioner-researcher within Burrington City FC. In my role as practitioner I was responsible for the delivery of sports psychology support to academy footballers between the age groups U9-U23, and was based within the organisation 3-4 days per week. My spare time away from the club was allocated to the write up and analysis of data collection methods.

I did not purport to approach the field setting as a blank slate or from an objective position, instead I brought a number of identities to the field. My personal history, conceptual dispositions and epistemological perspectives shaped the ethnographic source document (Krane & Baird, 2005). More specifically these 'selves' were a research based self (someone who did research), a self who was a sports psychology practitioner supporting the individuals in the organisation, a self who was a female, a student, an early career practitioner, and a passionate football fan. My influence on the research will be considered throughout the text, as there is no one way street between the researcher and the object of the study, rather the two continually affect each other over the course of the research process. I acknowledged that due to my role within the organisation I would be involved

in both the generation as well as the collection of data. Macphail (2004) used ethnographic research methods in a rowing club, and highlighted the issue of the self as an instrument of the research; she asserts that ethnographic research is a person-based project and who you are matters to your informants. Foley (2002) highlighted that critical self-awareness allows the researcher to realize their limitations as an interpreter, and to deflate the fantasies about absolute truth and objectivity. The notion of objectivity was rejected by May (1961) who believed that it is an existential fact that we become part of the social world that we study, and therefore it is impossible to remain totally objective.

There are many questions within ethnography as to whether researchers should be insiders within the setting or seen as outsiders. Some researchers (Hodkinson, 2005; Taylor, 2011) have suggested that insiders may provide a more sensitive and balanced view than outsider researchers, however critics have argued that the insider role results in the researcher becoming too close to the culture to be critical (Mercer, 2007). Naples (1997) argued against the idea of researchers being solely insiders or outsiders, and suggested that researchers are never fully inside or outside of the community under study. Although I present as an insider being funded by the club as a member of staff, I also very much viewed myself as an outsider. This was primarily because I was the only female in the environment, and did not spend as much time in the organisation as other members of full time staff. Further reflections are detailed later in the chapter. My previous role within Burrington City FC as a placement student meant that staff and players were familiar with my presence, and I had already developed a level of trust with the participants in the environment. In addition to this, my dual role as practitioner-researcher also reduced some of the boundaries associated with being accepted within the environment and being trusted. I did not use a Dictaphone, specific notepad, or any other means that might have affected existing relationships,

trust, access, or damage professional liability (Mitchell, et al., 1998), as I was aware that the mere presence of myself wearing the hat of researcher could have altered the attitudes and behavior of the individuals under study (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000). Over the duration of the research I was careful not to allow my presence to change the culture. I acted and operated in the same manner that I had during the 6-month placement. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) noted that this relationship with participants in the organisation may not always be advantageous, and could lead to what they describe as over rapport. More specifically, this may be interpreted as an over-identification with one group or individual preventing social mobility, and therefore relationships within a setting becoming impaired. The second and perhaps more serious level of over rapport relates to over identifying with the respondent's perspectives and misinterpreting what was being observed. The consequences of this could mean that biased views become prejudiced. The challenges that I faced in relation to this are explored within the methodological reflections section of this chapter.

2.4 MULTIPLE METHODS

The following section outlines the choice of methods used in this study, and how a multiple method approach was used to generate data. The rationale behind my methodological choices lie in accordance with Patton's (1990) suggestions on methodological appropriateness. To meet the objectives of the study I required flexibility in the method to approach and probe staff and players when it was appropriate. The aim of this was to gain a further understanding of the meaning of specific interactions and events. It was also important that the methods chosen would allow me to portray complex events and situations in a language that is specific to the events themselves (DeMarco *et al.*, 1996). A variety of perspectives were required in order to facilitate the development of a holistic understanding. Denzin (1989) supported this, and suggested that by

attaining the perspectives of other stakeholders within the organisation the data would be broadened, thickened, and deepened. A naturalistic approach, which makes use of multiple data collection methods (Kahan, 1999) was deemed the most appropriate method to satisfy the above criteria. Other researchers within sport and exercise psychology have supported this approach (Bowles 2014; Maitland, 2012; Potrac *et al.*, 2000). Despite field-based methodology being used to explore complex phenomena within sports such as cricket and rowing, there has been a lack of research to date exploring the delivery of sports psychology support within professional football. Therefore, I placed an emphasis on trying to keep the complexity, and the depth of the data collection, as opposed to taking a positive stance on the research and reducing the data into calculations and quantities. Over the 24-month data collection period, I immersed myself in the environment as a practitioner-researcher, used observation, field notes, interviews, and focus groups to supplement my own reflections.

Observation

I observed players and staff within the academy set up of Burrington City FC from September 2014 to May 2017. During this time, two full playing seasons and two preseasons were completed. For the much part I observed at least 3 days per week, dependent on the training and games schedules of the individuals involved. One factor that distinguishes this research from much of the other work in this area is my dual role during the data collection period. As previously discussed, I was responsible for the delivery of sports psychology support to the academy players, while also conducting the research project. My observations provided the backbone to the ethnographic process (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) and are characterized as “the fundamental base of all research methods in the social and behavioral sciences” (Adler & Adler, 1999, p.389). Lofland & Lofland (1984) defined participant observation as “the process in which an investigator establishes a many-

sided and relatively long term relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purposes of developing a scientific understanding of that association” (p.12). The purpose of the observations was to describe the setting and culture, interactions and activities that took place within the setting, the people that took part in the activities, and the meaning of what was observed from the perspective of those who were being observed (Cushion 2001). As a practitioner-researcher within the setting I would experience some of these interactions first hand, and therefore would better be able to understand the context and its process (Patton 1990). This direct observation would also enable me to gather data that perhaps wouldn’t arise in an interview because of it being overlooked, or participants being unwilling to discuss a particular topic.

Initially I began with a wide-angle lens, and took mental pictures of those things large, or small that captured my attentions either as a researcher or a practitioner (Spradley, 1980). As the data collection process progressed, my observations became narrower and more focused in order to meet the research objectives. The observation process involved creating a descriptively detailed, comprehensive, and conceptually framed understanding of the experiences of players, staff, and myself as they happened (Lofland, 1996; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999; Tedlock, 2000).

Reflexology

Reflexology is the process of critically reflecting on the self as a researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Bowles (2014) suggested that this is a significant part of the full methodological reporting of the research. Reflexive ethnography requires the ethnographer to engage in a thorough and detailed analysis of the ethnographer’s attempts to make sense of the world, while those being studied are also attempting to make sense of the world (Neyland, 2008). In light of the above, the process of self-reflective writing offers the perspective through which the practitioner cum researcher interpreted the data, including the so called facts and ideological assumptions that are

attached to such a position (Denzin, 2002). Secondly it allows the researcher to come clean about the way the research was conducted, and make the nature of the creative process explicit (Fleming, 1995). The researcher reflects on her experiences as a practitioner-researcher regarding issues relating to supporting players, and being embedded within the organisation. I further reflect on how my identity was positioned in the research process. My reflective log, and field notes contained reflections on my thoughts and emotions as I was within the field, whether in the data collection or writing up phase.

Field Notes

I followed the general advice here that field notes are the data of observation (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). I completed field notes after each occasion I was present in the club. The field notes reported the mundane, the routine, and the interesting. Furthermore, the field notes were descriptive, dated, and recorded key details, such as; where the observation took place, who was present, what the physical setting was, which social interactions occurred, and what activities took place (Lofland, et al., 2006). By engaging in this process it forced me to think about each aspect of the day, and to understand their meaning. Taking the time to write about these events further engrained them into my memory. For the duration of the research I wrote notes and reflections within a reflective journal. Mental notes were taken during the day, but reflections were completed at the end of the day. In line with the suggestions of Krane & Baird (2005), no longer than 24 hours passed before attending to the writing. It wasn't usually practical to write these in the club, in addition to this I found that writing them in a different and private setting facilitated more free flowing writing. Furthermore, I did not want to write detailed notes in front of participants so as not to make them feel uncomfortable (Parker, 2002). Writing the field notes highlighted any further questions that the observations raised. Each time I wrote a field note, I made sure to reflect on my

personal impressions and feelings regarding the event. In addition to the note taking on particular events throughout the day, I also reflected on the research process, my dual role, and experiences as a practitioner-researcher. The aim of this was to detect if my private emotional response to a situation was more widespread amongst participants and thus leading to analytical insight. Reviewing the field notes would help to clarify whether I was simply uncomfortable in the setting, or whether the emotions stemmed from something more fundamental in the field (Maitland, 2012). Initially no order was imposed on the field notes, however as months went by I increasingly recorded how things were patterned in the setting and where occurrences were examples of a concept. This eased the analytical work, as it provided me with a base platform to return to during the data analysis phase.

Interview

Informal interviews took place throughout the duration of the research. These informal conversations sought the words of the participants, the richer the better (Seidman, 2013). The depth of the conversations was important in gathering a truthful, meaningful, and deeply insightful account from those embedded within the organisation. Examples of informal interviews included; talking to players during the drinks break, speaking with players before or after a gym session, sitting speaking to players on the bus into training, conversations with the coaches in the their office, and sitting in the canteen. The formal interview process that was conducted for chapter 5 of the thesis is presented in a methods section at the start of the chapter.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis was not a distinct stage of the research process, data collection and data analysis were inextricably linked. The analysis consequently resulted in new questions, and new meanings

that were then further explored in the field (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Byrman & Burgess (1994) supported this and suggested that qualitative research cannot be reduced to set stages or particular techniques. Rather, as suggested by Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) the data analysis involved a continuous cycle of collecting, analyzing and reflecting on the collected data. In turn, this allowed for the development of preliminary ideas and analytical hunches which opened up new lines of inquiry for the researcher to select and pursue.

The data collected via the field notes and personal reflections were put into a 36-month timeline (Stafford, 2006). When writing the field notes, I ended up with a collection of ramblings, with both methodological and raw data entwined. This timeline was split into the months of the year, and key events from each month were noted. A timeline was thought to be the most effective means of portraying data in an accurate and authentic representation of the observed experiences across each season. The data took the form of progressive focusing (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) and from the initial timeline mind maps were produced outlining the key themes. From the identification of these key themes, smaller order themes were put into each category. I then picked those themes that were most relevant to the objectives of the study, and focused my later reflections and observations on these objectives only.

The data collected from the interviews was transcribed verbatim. Following this transcription, the script was read and re-read several times to familiarize the researcher with the data. This same process was also completed for data collected via the focus groups. The transcripts were then color coded into higher and lower order themes. This process set in motion a cascade of thoughts, feelings, and ideas about the data that would be noted down in a series of comment boxes. Alongside this the researcher made use of further mind maps and spider diagrams which represented the sparks of understanding. This was the beginning of organizing the data into

categories which were then compared and combined with the themes that emerged from the field notes. This formed the initial stage of an inductive data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

Following the initial analysis, the researcher had a huge amount of unstructured data without relation to theory. I had completed the initial stage of organizing and structuring the data, however it now needed to be theorized before writing up. Theory was introduced as a resource to begin to make sense of the data and add some meaning. The overall analysis provided a systematic and transparent link from data to theory. The theoretical statements became more meaningful as they could be linked with recognizable experiences as well as being underpinned by research rigor (Cushion, 2001).

As so much data was collected, I was concerned at this stage with how best to capture it. Initially I was conscious of trying to capture everything, but not in enough detail to do it justice. Contrary to this, my other concern related to reducing the breadth of the data but increasing the depth, the result being the absence of key findings. This struggle led me back to Tedlock (2000), and Krane & Baird's (2005) research on rationale for the use of ethnography in sports psychology. The ethnographic research method allowed me an up close and personal understanding of the unique world of professional football, and placed me in the thick of the data to understand participant's experiences in their own words. The challenge now was to make sense of the data, and make informed decisions on those findings that were appropriate to the research objectives.

2.6 WRITING AND REPRESENTATION

When it comes to the process of analyzing and writing up data there is no standardized set of procedures, rather Wolcott (1990) suggested that this should be something that is uniquely personal, shaped by the embodied experience, time pressures, and practical constraints of the

ethnographic research (Parker, 1998). Despite this, the process is underpinned by the researchers need to get to know the data. Withdrawing from my position within the field as researcher was not a clean break, I remained at the club in the role of practitioner whilst analyzing and writing up the data collected. Still being involved in the research setting posed both advantages and disadvantages in relation to this stage. The contact with participants was advantageous in keeping events fresh in my memory, and frequently reminded me of the language used by participants, and the meaning that would be utilized with this. However, at times still being embedded within the culture made it difficult to approach the research from the stance of an outsider, and I had difficulty in removing myself from within the organisation to reflect on the research as a whole.

Writing ethnography is a critical component of the ethnographic research process. Representing my own, coaches, and players experiences, and accompanying notions of support through embedded ethnographic processes required the researcher to firstly consider, and then offer a more contemporary form of representation. Atkinson and Delamont (2005) suggested that ethnography needs to remain faithful to the intrinsic aesthetic phenomena under study, and that the representational style should convey to the reader the world as experienced by the participants. In contrast with positivist research approaches that place an emphasis on an author evacuated text (Geertz, 1998), this research utilizes the first person, and aims for a more dramatic retelling of events. Van Maanen (1995) supported this and contended that ethnographic texts should go beyond traditional positivist epistemology and to a textual construction of reality that represents more than the mere reproduction of emic perspectives. Bowles (2014) suggested that there is no exact blueprint that the ethnographer should follow for its representational form. Therefore, I decided that the most appropriate writing style would be the one that came most naturally to me, and best fitted the data collection. I strived to keep the emotion, and close relation to the to the experiences

that I feel my raw data had captured. Therefore, the researcher is embedded in the text throughout and uses a series of tales about the self, the other, and the environment to help tell a more holistic story of the players, and practitioner's journey within professional football. This means that representations of the players, coaches, and my own experiences are presented together to provide a narrative that attempts to capture the vividness of a scene and the unique voices and lives of individuals in ways that normal social science texts cannot (Tierney, 2002). I placed an emphasis on not letting the self dominate the text unnecessarily. The creative non-fiction vignettes were then analysed in relation to theory. Tedlock (2000) stressed that the author must recognise, and hence represent the human being in a multiple strata of reality which may be organized in different ways, and therefore the work can be judged on whether the piece succeeds aesthetically in exposing the patterning of processes, opening up the text, and inviting interpretive responses (Rock, 2001).

The act of writing itself followed a similar pattern to that of Bowles (2014) and consisted of producing broad themes from fieldwork experiences that would later be narrowed down to chapter titles. I then focused on identifying subtitles within these chapters that would be derived from the field notes and interview/focus group transcripts. The aim of this was to create meaning from the data, relate different segments of information, and seek the support and feedback of others whilst then focusing on the next chapter. Drafts of each chapter were produced and concepts remodeled according to the ways they would develop in the dual process of reviewing the literature and putting pen to paper. Redrafting was influenced by the analytic process of the next chapter, and feedback from supervisors. Despite being interconnected, each chapter was written as a separate event.

2.7 RESEARCH QUALITY AND METHODOLOGICAL RIGOUR

Sparkes (1998) suggested that for our current knowledge and understanding of topics within sports psychology to grow, different methodologies that produce sources of knowledge are required. In traditional quantitative research, questions of quality refer to considerations of the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the research. However, a number of authors within qualitative research have questioned and rejected these terms on a number of levels. Ethnographic research has different epistemological and ontological assumptions to data collected using positivist methods, and therefore it makes little sense to impose criteria used to pass judgement on one methodological approach for another (Sparkes, 2000). Despite this, there are no uniform rules specified to judge the quality of alternative research methods because of the different interpretations of social phenomena (Cushion, 2001). In qualitative research, Lincoln & Guba's (1989) five judgement criteria have been most widely used (trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability). Lincoln, and Guba (1989) argued that credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Seale (1999) suggested that there are 5 criteria that can be used to judge the credibility of ethnographic research, and in turn ensure the trustworthiness of the data. These are; 1) prolonged engagement in the field, 2) continued observation, 3) triangulation exercises, 4) exposure of reports for peer review, and 5) examination for negative instances to challenge developing themes. Below, I have explained how this research demonstrated each of the above criteria.

The research project required me to be present in the field as a practitioner researcher for a duration of 36 months. Prior to this, I spent a period of time within the organisation observing the culture as part of an MSc placement. Continued observation supports the suggestions of Shenton (2004), who suggested that trustworthiness can be built by ensuring the development of an early familiarity

with the culture of participating organisation prior to data collection dialogues. Over the data collection period, I accumulated nearly 4000-hours engagement in the field. This evidences that the research project was not only longitudinal, but also involved my being at the club for a vast number of hours. The second research criteria (continued observation) is demonstrated by my observation in a range of locations for a 36-month period. Initially, everything was of interest to the researcher, however as the research project progressed my observations became more focused. I ensured that the variety of participants that were observed were positioned differently in the football club, and the wider football environment to provide access to different types of information. Varied aspects of organisational life were accessed through the inclusion of the following informants; parents, players, full time academy staff. During my time at the club I observed players/staff in the training ground, match day stadium, canteen, gym, sports science office, coach's office, education suite, car park, and on the bus. Using multiple methods in a range of settings allowed the researcher to gain information in a number of ways, and gives confidence that the material is more than just a product of the method (Maitland, 2012). Thirdly, the researcher engaged in data triangulation throughout the research project. Data triangulation is defined by Patton (1990) as checking the consistency of findings generated by different forms of data collection, and checking the consistency of the different data sources within the same methods. This was done in the following ways. Firstly, cross checking information derived at different times (e.g. were the events repetitive and what were new findings to the study). Secondly comparing what was said and how participants acted in public in comparison to their actions in private. This relates to the question of whether what was said on the training ground the same as in individual sessions. In addition to this, I compared data that was collected for Chapter 5 of the study using the different data collection methods (focus groups, interviews, evaluation forms). Although

Shenton (2004) identifies that both interviews and focus groups have shortcomings, their distinct characteristics also result in individual strengths. Other researchers (e.g., Guba & Hunter, 1989) have suggested that by using both focus groups and individual interviews the researcher compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits. Within chapter 5, a range of varied informants was used, for example, those that occupied different positions within the organisation (players, staff and parents across the different development phases). I suggest that this provides a richer, more holistic picture of the attitudes of the organisation.

Thirdly, checking the consistency of what was said and done by the participants over the 3-year time frame. Finally comparing perspectives from different points of view. The aim of triangulation was to increase understanding, and is supported by Shenton (2004) as a method to ensure the credibility of the data. For example, through the comparison of my personal reflections and the participant's perspectives gathered in an interview I developed a deeper understanding of a situation. Triangulation of the data perspectives was sought by purposive sampling. The use of purposive sampling is to select those cases with the richest information to study in depth (Patton, 1990). Maitland (2012) supported this and suggested that it is by selecting the information rich cases that we can learn the most about issues that have central importance to the study. It was quickly discovered through data triangulation that the data comparison may not always lead to conformance and confirmation. Data triangulation added depth and validity to the research findings.

I applied two levels of peer review to my work. The process of routine doctoral supervision enabled me to expose ongoing work and analysis, and offer new perspectives and ways of understanding. A colleague who had no experience in my research area also reviewed my work. I wanted to ensure that a person unfamiliar with the area could follow the research process and ensure that there was

clarity in my analysis. The second level of peer review involved member checking with the participants of the study. All participants who took part in an interview or focus group session were provided with an interview transcript prior to the data analysis. This allowed the participants to review the data and remove aspects of the data if they felt it was necessary. Finally, I continually engaged in a reflexive examination of methods and decisions that I made during the research process. My status and position in the research process was identified and reflected on. Methodological reporting was continually revised to ensure that sufficient detailed accounts were produced of all methods used. The aim of this was to challenge the assumptions made by myself, especially given my closeness to the project. Questions and observations posed by my supervisory team, and critical friends helped me to refine my methods, develop a greater explanation of the research design, and strengthen my arguments in light of the comments made (Shenton, 2004).

In addition to the above, I believe that the notions of ‘authenticity’ (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994), and ‘believability’ (Blumfield-Jones, 1995) are important components of this work. Authenticity refers to the fact that the text is faithful to the events that happened, and conveys a feeling of life within the organisation. This is illustrated throughout the text where I invite the reader into a vicarious experience by re-telling of events that occurred within the field. Lincoln and Denzin (1994) suggested that from this, the reader may gain experience of the participant’s lives, including moods, feelings, experiences, situational variety, and language. If the text meets these criteria the researcher should have a sensitivity to the lives being depicted, the events, characters, and social circumstances of the context. Believability is achieved if the narrative can convey the events in a way that they actually happened. Armour and Jones (1998) supported the use of these terms and suggested that understanding is a more fundamental concept for qualitative research than validity. I employed a range of tactics to ensure honesty in informants when they were contributing to the

data. For example, I emphasized to the participants prior to taking part in the interviews that honesty was of the utmost importance. In addition to this, observing the participants for a period of three years helped me to develop a strong understanding of the synergy between what participants said and the way that they acted.

2.7.1 Generalizability

The notion of generalizability has been critiqued within ethnographic research (Bowles, 2014). Despite this, the club has an ideographic, rather than nomothetic orientation, and seeks understanding and interpretation as opposed to generalization. This is supported by the fact that the research does not aim to test a hypothesis or theory to predict performance. Rather, the goal of the research is to understand the context of one professional football club as deep as possible, and provide an interpretive frame for the understanding of my experiences within the club. Geertz summarized this and suggested “the essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them” (p.26). It is suggested that studies in cultural analysis build by making subsequent work more informed and better conceptualized. In line with this, it is suggested that the large quantity of rich and diverse data collected in this research may offer further insight in contexts of a similar type, such as male dominated sports.

2.7.2 Ethics

Prior to entering the field, I obtained approval to commence research from Liverpool John Moores University ethics committee. I produced specific participant information sheets for each element of the study, and appropriate informed consent forms. The next step of the ethics process was to discuss the research with the Academy Director at Burrington City FC, who was also the

gatekeeper to the research. The aim of this was to provide the gatekeeper with relevant information about the purpose of the research, what the research would involve, and what would be required of the research participants. I ensured that the gatekeeper was comfortable with the basis on which I was conducting the research. Informed consent was attained for participation in the study, individual interviews, and focus groups. For this, informed consent was attained from the parents of those participants who were under the age of 16, and informed assent was obtained from the children themselves. The gatekeeper provided consent on behalf of the organisation for the observation element of the study. All participants were made aware of the purpose of the research and given the choice to opt out of the study at any point and the collected data be disregarded. Although all academy players and full time staff were required to sign informed consent, a further ethical issue was the crossover between the academy and 1st team environment. As explained earlier, in Burrington City FC both the first team and the academy train at the same complex, meaning that there is substantial crossover within the environment, I was aware that some of my observations may directly involve 1st team players and/or staff. This was highlighted in the university ethics application, and it was agreed that although some of the content of these observations may be reported on, individuals who were involved would be made aware of this, asked to sign informed consent forms, and be given the option to remove their data if necessary.

As was highlighted during the university ethical approval process I faced a number of ethical challenges in relation to the issue of anonymity and confidentiality. Declaration of research intent was highlighted by Bowles (2014), and is something that is an ambiguous area of ethnographic research because of its methodological foundations (Brewer, 2000). In assessment of the potential risks associated with the study it was agreed that the research would be carried out overtly, and therefore all participants would be made explicitly aware of the purpose and involvements of the

research. It was agreed that while I could guarantee the anonymity of individuals within the organisation I could not guarantee the anonymity of the organisation. Confidentiality was assured for all individuals within the study as no real names were included, and no information that may lead to the identification of any individual has been used. The researcher's role within the organisation as an applied practitioner meant that the organisations anonymity could not be guaranteed. However, all information would be anonymized as far as possible, and I understood my responsibility to act in the best interests of the participants at all times. Fleming (2013) supported this and suggested that the problem of anonymity relies on good judgement and a guide to good practice. The notion of confidentiality is explored in more detail in the methodological reflections section of the chapter.

Over the duration of the research it was understood that I would experience a range of complex situations which may lead to unpleasant memories, as may be the case for the players/staff within the environment. An example of this may be the disclosure of verbal abuse. This was something that stood out to me in the university ethical requirements, and as suggested by Norris (1993) there are three options of dealing with information that arises here. The first is to report, lodge a complaint, or publish damningly; the second would be to abandon the research or at least not include the data; the final would be to treat it like any other data and publish accordingly. The first choice was rejected except where the situation was deemed dangerous, this is because it breaches participant anonymity and confidentiality and may spoil the field for future enquiry. The second choice encourages the manipulation of data, and may even force the researcher to leave the field of inquiry. The final approach allows the researcher to keep the promises of the research bargains and maintain the integrity of the data, whilst continuing in the field. This was deemed the most appropriate choice, and followed the suggestions of Macphail (2004) and Maitland (2012).

2.8 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

What follows are a series of reflections that outline some of the practical issues concerning my role in the research process as a whole during the 3-year research engagement. These reflections document some of the thoughts, feelings, and blunders of interaction I experienced along the way. By providing what I believe to be honest and open reflections of my research experiences I hope to portray both the two-way process of ethnographic fieldwork, and the more solitary occupation of putting it all together.

2.8.1 Entry into the setting and developing trust

Due to my prior involvement with the club my transition to the role of practitioner-researcher was initially without difficulty. I made participants aware of the research project through the use of information sheets, and small group discussions, these explained the purpose of the study, and what would be required of each individual (players, staff, parents). All stakeholders agreed to participate in the study. Some of the parents dug deeper and strived to understand how the research would be beneficial for themselves and their child. However, there was nothing of the sort from the players or staff. I got the feeling at this stage that because both the players and coaches were familiar with my presence that they paid less attention to what I was explaining regarding my research, and saw it merely as me studying another course at university. This notion was something that challenged me from both a personal and an ethical perspective. An extract taken from my reflective log demonstrates this.

November 2015

'I enrolled onto the PhD 2 months ago now, and it still doesn't feel like I'm getting through to the coaches. I've tried, and tried again to make them aware of what the research involves, and the fact

that I don't just occupy the role of sports psychology support, I am also conducting a PhD study... But why aren't they bothered about this. Some of the players show so much more interest, Josh (an U23 player) even asked me the other day about how job prospects change if you do a master's degree, as his sister is currently a final year student in sport and exercise science. I'm not asking for them to show great interest, but the acknowledgement that I am more than just a practitioner would mean a lot. I was battling with my own insecurities regarding the dual role, and an ounce of interest in my research would have gone a long way in resolving these. What happened today was in some ways laughable, but in others hugely frustrating. The U18 manager, whom I have worked with for over a year approached me and asked "so what thingy is it you're doing at uni again?". When I reminded him of the discussions we'd had previously, and explained that I was conducting a piece of research, he responded... "yeah, yeah, all that's beyond me, as long as you keep doing what you do with the lads that's all that matters". What did I have to do to get him to listen, he had clearly ignored what I was saying. The response "why bother asking if you don't care" was being screamed at him inside my head, but I didn't dare let it out. This was something that I was both growing increasingly frustrated by, but also increasingly used to. I knew that it was my responsibility to make all participants aware of the research project, but nowhere could I find any information on what to do if they weren't interested in, or didn't want to acknowledge it.'

This reflection documents the first of a series of events surrounding this theme, and my experiences did not get any easier over the 3-year data collection period. At the start of the project my previous involvement with the club offered a number of benefits, including easing my access to the participants, developing trust and relationships, and developing an understanding of the culture. However, it also came with a range of downfalls that I did not expect. I was aware of Parker's (1995) findings on the perceptions and conceptions of education in professional football, but this

didn't mean that actually experiencing them was any easier. The most challenging of these for me personally was participant's refusing to acknowledge my role as a PhD student. As a young practitioner hoping to develop an identity as an early career researcher, when Burrington City FC turned a blind eye to the research, it significantly influenced my affiliation with the researcher role. I was consciously forcing myself away from the academic label, and towards the more accepted role I possessed as a sports psychology practitioner. I searched the ethnographic research literature for others who may have had a similar experience to myself. However, other than the work of Cushion (2001) on coach behavior within professional football, I could not see any similarities. After deep reflection, and frequent supervisory meetings, I began to believe that the challenges that I faced were due to the club, and culture itself as opposed to the research project. Other authors (Cushion, 2001; Nesti, 2010; Parker, 1996) have supported the difficulties faced by academics within professional football, and suggest that one barrier preventing sports psychologists from working within the sport is their label as an academic.

During the university ethics application process much of the focus was on the need to make participants explicitly aware of the research project. Therefore, I was not only concerned about how situations such as the above were affecting me, but also that by some of the participant's unwillingness to acknowledge the research, I was leaving myself open to a number of potential issues during the write up phase. In order to try and prevent these coming to fruition, I made a conscious effort to remind the participants of the research process on appropriate occasions during the data collection, and write up phases. However, I was also careful not to over-remind the participants to the extent that it influenced their behavior within the research setting.

2.8.2 Role Conflict

As suggested by Bowles (2014), the potential for role conflict in ethnographic research is great, especially when the researcher occupies a dual role within the organisation. Throughout the duration of the research project, I occupied the role of practitioner-researcher within the organisation. One of the benefits of this, was that my role as a practitioner helped to offset my academic status in an environment that is skeptical of those with a university background (Littlewood & Nesti, 2011). It helped me to build relationships with individuals that otherwise wouldn't have been possible, and finally enabled me to feel that I was giving something back to the club in return for them allowing me to conduct the study. Without the occupation of this second role I truly believe that I would not have been granted access to the organisation. This was supported by Arber (2006) who suggested that the ability to offer something back to the organisation of study may offset some of the organisations concerns with regards to the research taking place in the first place. However, having a dual role as both a practitioner and a researcher did pose a series of challenges.

I frequently found myself thinking about the meaning of the term 'who am I'. I knew that I was a sports psychology practitioner, and a PhD researcher. However, I struggled to understand the complexities of when practice becomes research and vice versa. Nolan (2007) supported this, and suggests that there are a number of ethical pitfalls in ethnographic research that on most occasions we are not adequately trained to deal with. Arber (2006) used ethnographic research methods to explore being a practitioner-researcher nurse in a hospice, and found that one of the most tiring aspects of the research was finding a balance between the different roles, They described this as an emotional process that required constant attention and awareness. I reflect on the challenge of occupying a dual role below.

March 2015

What I am struggling to understand is how do I know when to research, and how do I know when it is applied practice. I mean it's obviously practice when I am sat in an individual session with a client, but does that also mean it is research? 'Report on anything that is meaningful to you no matter how big or small'... That's what I entered the setting 6 months ago thinking. But at the moment that just means everything, so is my answer that everything is research?

December 2016

I am so drained. It was the last day before the Christmas break today. The session involved an 11 vs 11 fun match with all of the staff sat in the stand. The staff were laughing, and everyone was in the festive spirit. I wanted to just let go of my role as a researcher, relax, and enjoy in the same way as everyone else. Instead, I was conscious of keeping the researcher hat on and subtly eavesdropping on the little bursts of conversation. At that moment, on that one day, I wanted to be just like all of the other staff at Burrington City FC. I didn't want anything else. Just to be free.

The above reflections paint a picture of my thoughts and feelings 6 months into the research journey, and 15 months down the line. Both reflections demonstrate the frustrations that I faced with occupying a dual role. Although there is very little literature that has reflected on practitioner-researcher research within sports psychology, my experiences were similar to those previously recorded in the literature by nurses and teachers (Arber, 2007; Nolan, 2007; Ramirez & Bartunek, 1989). On reflection, those who occupied the role of practitioner-researcher suggested that it was far from straightforward, and that the potential for role conflict is great throughout the research process (Coghlan, 2007). Parker (1996) supported this, and suggested that practitioner-researcher field-based research can be challenging for the researcher in not only having to tolerate stress of

being in the participant's environment, but also having to prove valuable to the organisation in the role of practitioner.

2.8.3 Data collection methods

The following methodological reflection relates to a specific element of the data collection itself. Individual semi structured interviews were conducted with some of the players, and staff to supplement other data collection methods. The interviews were conducted in the final 6 months of the data collection process, and it was hoped that they would provide a means for either supporting or contradicting the data gathered via observation, field notes, and informal interviews. Prior to the first interview, it was thought that having a dual role as a practitioner-researcher would facilitate the interview process. Over my time at Burrington City FC, I had developed an in depth understanding of the terminology and language used by individuals at the club. I believed that this would be advantageous in seeking the words of the participants themselves, in as much detail as possible to enrich the data collection (Smith & Sparkes, 2006). In addition to this, I had worked with the individuals for over 2 years, and therefore had developed a strong level of trust with the participants. I believed that this would encourage them to provide me with honest and open responses to my questions.

Despite these benefits, I found the interview process particularly challenging. The objectives of the interviews were; to understand the common challenges faced by players as they progress through Burrington City FC's academy set up, to evaluate the psychological development program that has been designed and delivered within Burrington City FC, and finally to explore how players/staff could have been better supported from a psychological perspective. In contrast with the positive impact that I previously believed my dual role would have on the interview dialogue,

in reality I found that my role as a sports psychology practitioner within Burrington City FC had a detrimental effect on the interview process. I reflect on this below.

I did 3 more interviews with the U18s today, not many to go now. The sooner this process is over the better! Every time I enter the classroom with a player I seem to get a little tenser. I know what looms ahead. The interviews always start ok... can you tell me about this? Or can you give an example of that? But I know at some point we will reach the dreaded questions, that's when the sweating begins. Objective 2 of the interview- to evaluate the psychological development program that I have designed and delivered over the last 24 months. EESH! When I reach this point I know I am in a lose lose situation. Outcome 1; the participant provides a good evaluation of the program and explains a good level of effectiveness. Outcome 2; the participant gives a good evaluation of the program but doesn't feel it has been as effective for them as they would have liked. Outcome 3; the participant finds it difficult to evaluate as I (the person who has designed and delivered the program) am conducting the interview. In an ideal world any individual would hope for outcome 1. However, it didn't quite feel right in this situation. When outcome 1 had occurred it made me squirm a little inside, I am supposed to probe and get specific examples but doesn't this just make me look even more self-centered and egotistical. I didn't want to come across in this way, but how could I not! This was not supposed to be some sort of confidence boosting intervention for myself, it was supposed to be an honest appraisal of my work over the last 36 months. I grew increasingly uncomfortable at any positive feedback given. This brings me onto my second issue. How could I guarantee that what these players were saying was true, and not influenced by my presence as the researcher. Although I emphasized to each individual prior to the start of the interview how important it was for them to be honest, I could not guarantee it. Having a good relationship with the players did not necessarily mean that they found my work effective. But as a young player

speaking to a member of staff, it would take a lot of courage to speak up and say this. I know I certainly wouldn't if I was one of them. Outcome 2 was the result that sat most comfortably with me. Although this meant that the individuals found my work less effective which of course has impact long term. Despite this, it was so much easier to sit with a player in an individual interview and be told how things could be better, it was easier to probe, I didn't feel like someone seeking re-assurance, I also valued their honest appraisal. Outcome 3 was the least favorable, and has only occurred on one occasion so far. The answer "I'm not sure" was frequently given by one player despite umpteen attempts to probe or phrase the questions in a different way. A part of me thought it would be more appropriate if someone else took part of this part of the study.

The reflection above is a representative example of my other reflections during the interview process. When the interviewee gave positive feedback I was reluctant to probe or attain specific examples, I was both embarrassed, and aware of coming across as using the interviews to feed my ego. This was particularly obvious when I analysed the interview transcripts. Following the revelation of positive feedback, on occasions I would shut down the avenue and change the topic. In reality, I should have probed the participants to attain the in-depth rich data that I was striving for. Given my reflections, I strongly believe that the interview process would have been improved if someone other than myself had conducted the interviews. This may have reduced any bias, and encouraged truly honest appraisals. Seidman (1998) supported this, and noted that even if the ethnographic researcher strived to ensure that meanings were as much a function of the participant's construction, reconstruction, and reflection, they must realize that meaning to some degree, would be a function of the participant's interaction with the researcher themselves; me. The current literature on the use of ethnography does not offer any solutions to situations similar to what I experienced. This was a limitation to my method, and equally a strength to my work.

2.8.4 Insider Outsider

In ethnographic research, authors discuss the researcher as either an insider, or an outsider. Insider research involves the researcher conducting a piece of research with populations that they are also members of. Therefore, the researcher shares an identity, language, and experiential base with the study participants (Asselin, 2003). Prior to the start of the research, I would have argued that my unlimited access, and role as a practitioner within the organisation placed me firmly in the insider camp. I looked to reduce any distance between the participants and myself. Developing an identity as an insider was an attractive prospect as I would feel like I had been accepted as part of the organisation. This seemed a more comfortable stance than being the lone female academic. I mention the word female here as this created an immediate barrier between myself and Burrington City FC that neither of us were in control of, or could change. Furthermore, I feel it had a significant influence on my desire to become part of the organisation and be accepted.

However, as the research process progressed, I fluctuated between the feelings of being an insider, and an outsider. Any event, no matter how big or small could lead to me feeling more suited to one camp than the other, but there was definitely a gradual progression in my personal preference to a role as an outsider. This was supported by Bowles (2014), who suggested that rather than being either fully an insider or fully an outsider, we are placed somewhere on an insider-outsider continuum, and our place on this scale will vary over the duration of the research project.

In the first instance, I reflect on how I felt when I was given an initialed tracksuit like all other members of staff. This helped me to develop an identity as part of the academy within Burrington City FC.

'I got the new kit today... THE NEW KIT. Surprising how big of a deal this actually feels. I am in the right colored kit, in the right size, with my initials on. FC is now part of the team. My role hasn't changed, people's opinion of me hasn't changed, but this has sealed something. Sealed the fact that I am one of them'.

Looking back at this now I have different perceptions. I felt that wearing the club kit would give me a common ground with the research participants, and ease the process of the data collection. Despite this, my excitement of wearing the kit soon dwindled, and events that made me question my status as an insider before I was given the kit still made me question it afterwards. Nothing had changed, wearing the club kit didn't mean that I was an accepted member of Burrington City FC, it just meant that I dressed in the same way as them. However, I don't feel that this was a negative. As the research project progressed being an insider became less important, I started to view the role of insider/outsider in the broader context of the research as opposed to trying to satisfy my own needs. At times it was beneficial to play the role of insider as the participants acted normally with me in the environment, and were more willing to share their experiences. This was perhaps because they felt as though "You are one of us, and it is us versus them (those on the outside who don't understand)" (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). However, I had begun to realize that for the purposes of the research, the ability to remove myself from the situation would help to overcome issues such as having clouded perceptions, researcher bias, and overlooking important aspects of the research. I reflect on this below.

'T.G.I.F. Thank God Its Friday. Fridays are my down time, my time to sit and reflect on the week, my time away from the busyness, stress, and hassle of the workplace. Prior to starting this research, I didn't appreciate the beauty of silence, now I wouldn't swap this time for anything. I

am glad to be away from Burrington City FC, it helps me to see things from a different perspective, put on the outsider's hat and look back on the week.'

This demonstrates that how, over the duration of the research project, my values and beliefs were shaped and altered by the research process. I began to value things that previously would have induced a real anxiety, for example my time spent away from the club. I was becoming more comfortable in my own skin, rather than investing all of my effort into being included within Burrington City FC. Lofland *et al* (2006) draw out the benefit of the constant movement between insider and outsider, between balance and distance. They suggest that to ask questions of, to make problematic, and to bracket social life requires the outsider perspective of distance; and to acquire intimate familiarity with social life from the vantage point of those studies requires the closeness afforded by an insider position.

2.8.5 Confidentiality

In the final reflective section, I discuss how confidentiality impacted my role as both a practitioner, and a researcher. The issue of confidentiality is something that I have grappled with from the ethics application phase of the research. The first dilemma that I faced related to ensuring the anonymity of the research organisation. After seeking the advice of the university ethics application committee the most appropriate method of making stakeholders aware of the issue was to sit and explain to the gatekeeper, and then provide all other participants with an information sheet. The process of confidentiality continued to challenge me, and required me to make a number of challenging decisions over the duration of the research.

Although I could guarantee the anonymity of individuals within the organisation, I was overwhelmed by the sense of betrayal that I felt towards both the organisation, and the individuals

within Burrington City FC at all stages of the research, particularly during the write up phase. Despite taking great care in protecting the identity of the individuals, my concerns remained.

February 2017

Today I was approached by a player whose dad was in a critical condition after suffering a heart attack. The player asked to speak to me, nobody else, and he didn't feel comfortable in telling the other staff within the club. Eventually I convinced him that this was an issue the club welfare officer needed to be aware of. However, I'm now grappling with where this event sits from a research perspective. This one encounter drew so many emotions. I was pleased, he wouldn't have come to me if he didn't trust me, I must be doing something right. This was a critical moment for myself, and the players. But, if I was to incorporate this within my thesis as a pivotal moment for the development of my professional identity was I being ethical?

It seems appropriate to discuss the challenges I faced in relation to confidentiality as a practitioner alongside my role as researcher. In sports psychology journals, codes of practice, and guide books (Andersen, 2001; BASES code of conduct; BPS code of conduct) there is a clear emphasis placed on the importance of maintaining client confidentiality. However, how this actually works in practice has received little attention. Following the information that I had read within the information sources outlined above, I made the decision to deliver a presentation to all full time academy and 1st team staff at Burrington City FC titled 'The Importance of Confidentiality'. I reflect on how this was received below.

January 2015

Although nervous, I spoke confidently, fully believing that the staff would understand why I saw confidentiality as paramount to my success with the players. I finished the presentation and looked

to the staff for feedback. Joe (U23 manager) brashly spoke “I don’t agree with all this confidentiality malarkey, that’s not the way it is around here”. I gulped and slowly lifted my head to look at the reaction of the other staff. To my dismay they nodded in agreement, and I knew it was now going to be an uphill battle. In an attempt to take the pressure off myself I asked Joe what he meant, however his response only confirmed that his opinion was strong. He got to the point quickly, and abruptly stated “the staff here have worked with each other long enough to know that everyone needs to be kept in the loop about everything, you do your job, but any problems must go to the coach. If we don’t know how players are mentally we can’t pick the strongest team”. My heart rate rose again, the main reason for maintaining confidentiality is exactly what he just explained as his reasoning for no confidentiality. I couldn’t cave in and agree, it would be morally, and ethically wrong. But this guy is important, he’s been at the club nearly 15 years, and what he says goes. I decided to provide more reasoning for my argument and explained my duty of care towards the players. I also provided the staff with a scenario, asked them to put themselves in the player’s shoes and decide if I should take the issue to the coach... Small scale conversations started to emerge and little debates were being triggered all around the room. For now, I could recompose myself, reign in my emotions, and aim to take back control of the discussion. In a bid for some positivity, I asked if anyone thought the example issue should be kept confidential. The head of the EPP, and current U16 coach (Dave) spoke, he was an ex-player and reinforced my belief that confidentiality would be important if I was to be effective in my role. The willingness of Dave to express his opinion provided me with huge relief, the conversation carried on and Joe’s voice wasn’t as big and dominating anymore, other people were getting the courage to say their piece whether agreeing with Joe or not. More confident in my stance, I rounded up the conversation and asked what the thoughts were moving forward, although Joe started with “Even though I don’t

agree” he finished with “you make a judgement on what needs to be kept confidential, we will leave it up to you, as long as your job gets done”. This wasn’t positive, but it was a lot less negative than his previous answers. On the train home I re-ran the discussion in my mind, and arrived at a number of conclusions. I knew that some of the staff were reluctant to have me on board, and the words from Joe “that’s just the way it is around here” stuck in my mind as reinforcing this view. I was an individual with a role that required me to operate in a different way to many of the other staff within a football club. Today I was left feeling open, challenged, but also proud that I stuck by my morals. Despite this, the most important message I took home related to my reason for being employed by the football club, they didn’t seem ready, and it didn’t feel like they wanted me.’

The following paragraph aims to synthesize the narrative above in relation to two concepts; the ethical requirement of confidentiality for safe practice, and how this encounter impacted my sense of belonging at the club. Confidentiality was defined by Koocher and Keith-Spiegel (2009) as a general standard of professional conduct that obliges a professional not to discuss information about a client with anyone. More closely related to sports psychology, both the BPS and BASES accreditation bodies have association codes on the rules of confidentiality. The BPS states that for applied practitioners it is a moral necessity, duty, and obligation to maintain confidentiality unless consent is given otherwise. Further to this, the need to maintain confidentiality was often the focus of both my undergraduate and postgraduate lectures. Together, these provided me with a strong understanding on the importance of confidentiality, and the essential role it plays in the ethics of sports psychology. As a result of this, I took it for granted that those involved in sport would all have the same understanding and belief as myself... Confidentiality is essential. The call from the U23 coach to breach confidentiality both came as a shock, and challenged me culturally and psychologically. Andersen (2005) emphasized the importance of maintaining confidentiality.

However, Gould et al (2001) suggested that in order for confidentiality to be effective, there is a need for support from the coaches. In my case I found it extremely difficult to gain this support despite my attempts to explain that in medical, legal, and clinical disciplines professionals cannot deliver a service without it.

The encounter left me questioning my value, worth, and belonging at the club. Although I was unsure if the football club was ready to be introduced to sports psychology, I believe that clarifying my position upfront helped to resolve the situation. The above was not an isolated incident, and was a very difficult topic to overcome. Coaches would frequently ask me what was said during a discussion with a player, or why I was working with one individual and not another. Initially this caused be a great deal of anxiety, and I felt a lot of pressure to respond to their questions without actually answering. However, over time confidentiality became less of an issue to staff and players, this might be attributed to it becoming the norm, or because individuals within the organisation started to see the value of confidentiality in my work. As staff changed over the data collection phase, new perspectives on the topic appeared. These were based on the individuals backgrounds and previous experience. The scenario below demonstrates this.

The U18 assistant manager (Ryan) joined the club in August 2015 after ending his playing career at a local club. I have had little contact with this individual in comparison to the U18 manager due to the days in which they are present at the club, and the offices that they are based. However, Ryan has recently identified a 1st year scholar (Scott) that he believes needs extra psychological support psychologically. Ryan explained the reason behind this to me, and based on my own observations I agreed with his suggestions. Two weeks later was the first time that Ryan checked back with me on my work with Scott. As he approached me he quietly asked for a word, something that straight away put me on edge. This usually only means one thing- a coach is going to ask me

for information on a player. Ryan went on to say “Have you been working with Scott like we said?”, I quickly racked my brain to think how I could answer to prevent him from asking anything more specific, “Yes” I stuttered. Before I had a chance to continue, he butted in “ok, I don’t need to know anymore just a yes will do”. He walked back out of the office and didn’t look back. I smiled to myself, at least one person listened”.

Despite the above events, it would be untruthful for me to say that the issue has been fully resolved. I still find that coaches ask questions such as “what has X got to say for himself then”. After 36-months working closely with these individuals, I conclude that more formal education is required on this topic. With only a small amount of literature available, and the identified difficulties surrounding confidentiality in professional football it could be suggested that further work with staff at English football clubs is essential.

2.9 SUMMARY

It was suggested by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) that researcher emotionality within ethnography is not only entirely normal and appropriate for the task of researching, but a fundamental feature of ethnographic research. This was particularly evident in my research, and I found that I was required to draw upon a variety of support mechanisms such as peer support, supervisor meetings, and an ethnography club to help me to look beyond the present, and to the future benefits for those who aspire to work in the field. Lofland & Lofland (1984) suggested that these feelings were normal when conducting fieldwork, and proposed the following stages of emotional stress for researchers engaging in fieldwork; deception and a fear of disclosure, loathing and a desire to withdraw, sympathy and impulse to help, marginality and a temptation to convert. At one stage or another I felt all of these emotions. Based on my experiences, the addition of more ethnographic

support groups situated either within or external to universities would help to build a strong support network for individuals that are conducting this type of research.

Despite all of the issues that I faced over the 36 month period, I made it my objective to behave at all times with compassion and sensitivity, honesty and integrity, and display within my conduct a personal demeanour, a level of respect, and admiration and appreciation towards the individuals within Burrington City FC. Furthermore, I have aimed to give the reader a deeper understanding of the ethical issues I faced, and their resolution so as to provide the reader with a measure of the reliability of the findings (Maitland, 2012). Raising awareness of some of these ethical issues and their impact on my academic and personal development may help to inform other individuals who aspire to undertake similar work in the future. I believe that entering the setting with a heightened awareness of ethnographic challenges will encourage researchers to identify potentially problematic situations early, and quickly develop appropriate solutions (e.g., confidentiality breaches or individuals asking difficult questions).

In this chapter, I have explained the rationale behind the use of ethnography, explored the research paradigm, and discussed the process of data collection, data analysis, and representation. Finally, I have presented a series of critical reflections on the process of occupying a dual role as a sport psychology practitioner-researcher. The findings from this chapter have highlighted the potential for ethnography to deepen our understanding of complex topics in sports psychology, particularly within sports cultures that have not been previously explored. However, occupying a dual role as a practitioner-researcher brought with it a number of moral and ethical dilemmas, and required me to make decisions that challenged my own values and beliefs. Building on the findings from chapter 2, and using ethnographic principles, the following chapter seeks to explore how my

experiences as a practitioner within Burrington City FC shaped my professional development and identity over the research duration.

CHAPTER 3. PRACTITIONER IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review highlighted that identity has been defined and discussed in a number of alternative ways based on the domain from which the researcher originates (Côté, 2016). For example, individuals embedded within a psychological approach may view identity in a different manner to individuals from a sociological background (Côté, 2002). More specifically, Gecas & Burke (1995) suggested that psychologists generally take an intrapsychic viewpoint (e.g. within the self), whereas sociologists take a macro-social viewpoint (e.g. interaction between the self and others). Despite each position offering unique theoretical advantages, there are some similarities between the different interpretations. Côté (1997) acknowledged this, and introduced a developmental social-psychological approach to identity formation known as the identity capital model (ICM). Three key bodies of work were brought together to form the ICM; Erikson's (1968) approach to identity formation, sociological conceptions of late-modernity (e.g., Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991), and Goffman's (1959, 1963) interactionist models of identity management techniques in the presentation of self (Côté, 2016, p.5).

Côté offered an alternative stance on the construct of identity. In contrast to common Western beliefs, his ideas closely align with Eastern and Buddhist perspectives. In Western psychology, researchers believe that notions such as our self-concept, self-image, and self-esteem are instrumental in constructing our identity (Williams & Andersen, 2012). However, Eastern and Buddhist approaches suggest that there is no core self, and that each of these constructed selves are false selves (Williams, & Andersen, 2012, p.141). Rather, they believe that our identity is fluid and constantly unfolding, determined by the environment in which the individual exists. Côté (2016) supported this, and proposed that identity is a cognitive structure that allows a person to

organize their self-ideas and make decisions. In a sense, Côté believes that our identities are a toolbox of our “resources” that can be used in certain contextual situations.

The origin of the ICM model is based in part on Côté’s own experiences of moving from a working class to middle class community, and among various cultural contexts (2016). More specifically, the ICM proposed that in late modern societies traditional normative structures have diminished, and therefore individuals are required to individualize their identities in the face of certain risks and opportunities (Côté, 2016, p.4). For example, Côté (2016) noted that in some Western societies roles and statuses are no longer strictly ascribed, such as the passing on of occupations from one generation to the next and therefore professional identity formation is more complex. As a result of this, Côté (2016) suggested that the resources an individual has available at their disposal are increasingly important. These resources are identified on a continuum as being tangible, or intangible (Côté, 2002; 2016). Tangible resources are demonstrated through an individual’s behaviors and possessions, and may include; finance, qualifications and professional memberships, and parental social status. In contrast, intangible resources refer to the personality attributes of the individual (Côté, 2016, p.53), and include ego strength, locus of control, self-esteem, a sense of purpose in life, and moral reasoning abilities (Côté, 1997). Researchers have suggested that we use our available tangible and intangible resources in impression management, and identity negotiations to gain acceptance within a particular social context (Côté, 2016; Goldie, 2012).

The ICM has been used as a framework to explore the development of professional identity within nursing and education (Côté, 1997; Goldie, 2012; Hallam, 2012). The term professional identity is difficult to define; Lawler (2008) supported this and suggested that professional identity is abstract, and often used in a pejorative context. However, the general consensus is that an

individual's professional identity unites them with a professional group, and is a much desired label in modern societies. Research on professional identities has primarily been conducted with educational (teachers) and medical professionals (doctors and nurses) at an early stage of their career (e.g., Coldron & Smith, 1999; Hall & Burns, 2009; Timostuk & Ugaste, 2010).

To date, there are only a small number of published articles exploring professional identity within the field of sports psychology (e.g., Williams & Andersen, 2012). In the last decade, there has been an increase in both the number of published articles exploring the training and development experiences of sports psychologists (Anderson et al., 1997; Williams & Scherzer, 2003), and reflective accounts from trainee practitioners on their early career experiences (Collins *et al.*, 2013; Lindsay *et al.*, 2007; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008). It is suggested that this research has made a significant contribution towards our understanding of professional development, and supported other neophyte consultants who are beginning their delivery careers (Tod, 2007). However, it has placed a narrow focus on particular questions such as the development of a congruent philosophy of practice, authenticity, individuation, and the changing role of the supervisor (e.g., Collins *et al.*, 2013). These authors have focused on their journey to self-awareness and acting in accordance with who they believe they are. Although this process indirectly explores the development of a professional/personal identity, the authors have not explicitly recognised this. Therefore, it is important to examine professional development from a different viewpoint to much of the previous work, and place identity in the central position. Williams and Andersen (2012) supported this view, and explored a neophyte sports psychology practitioner's experiences of developing a professional identity during a two-year period working with Olympic and Paralympic athletes. Their findings aligned with Buddhist ideals on identity, and suggested that our identity is fluid, and continually evolves depending on the situations that

an individual is exposed to. However, the paper only focused on identity as one of three strands (multiple roles, boundary-blurring), and therefore it is suggested that further research would be beneficial.

This chapter builds upon previous research on professional development and identity in sports psychology (e.g. Collins *et al.*, 2013; Tod, 2007; Tod & Bond, 2010; Tod *et al.*, 2011). Ethnographic research methods were used to explore how the situations I was exposed to as a neophyte sports psychology practitioner, operating within professional football, shaped my professional identity over a longitudinal time frame. It is important to address this gap both in terms of knowledge advancement and real world impact. The chapter will extend our understanding of sports psychology practitioner development, and build upon the work of Williams and Andersen (2012) by placing identity as the central focus of a female sports psychology practitioner's experiences working within professional football. In addition to this, the chapter presents implications for the applied sports psychology community, and specifically for practitioners that are yet to enter the field via both university education and professional training pathways.

The aim of the current chapter is to identify and discuss a range of critical moments that played a pivotal role in shaping and challenging my identity as a trainee sports psychology practitioner. As suggested in the literature review, critical moments are the “frequently experienced moments in our lives where we must confront the anxiety associated with an important change in our identity” (Nesti, 2012, p.23). My experiences are presented as a series of entries across a three-year time frame, starting from the point of immersion in the setting, and ending with the completion of this thesis.

3.2 CONSTRUCTING THE NARRATIVES

The following narratives were constructed using the process of reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). More specifically, this involves the researcher reflecting on the self in their role and attempting to make sense of the world around them. Denzin (2002) supported the use of reflexivity, and suggested that it offers a perspective through which a researcher can interpret their data. More specifically, I reflected on myself as a sports psychology practitioner operating within the social context of professional football. I used my own memories, and sought the help of significant others to record and recall those events, conversations, and experiences that contributed to the development of my professional identity. The who, what, where, and why were noted, and supplemented by further reflection on my emotional and behavioral reaction to the situations I experienced. Later reflections determined the long-term implications of such events.

As noted in the methods section, all reflections were documented within a timeline that represented the different months across each year of the data collection. A process of progressive focusing took place (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), and mind maps were produced that outlined those moments that continually arose. Following the recollection of events, and the identification of situations that were most relevant to the objectives of the thesis, I examined the literature for common themes and links. The aim of this was to find an approach/approaches to identity that best helped me to make sense of my own experiences.

3.2.1 Writing Style

The data collected required me to offer a more contemporary representation style. I chose to use a creative narrative approach here to keep the emotion, bear a close relation to the experiences that the raw data captured, and engage the reader (Rinehart, 2005). The narratives are presented over

time to provide the reader with further meaning, and identity is used as a golden thread to connect the narratives. Following each narrative, I analyse the narratives in relation to theoretical material that supports, but not overshadows the creative content. Reflective stop offs are taken at different points of the discussion to present the impact of the vignettes on my professional development and identity across time. A final section summarizes the implications of the whole story in relation to future research, applied sports psychology practice, and professional training routes.

3.2.2 Ethics

The research project was carried out overtly, and therefore all participants were made explicitly aware of the purpose and involvements of the research. Confidentiality is assured for all individuals within the study. This was ensured by the exclusion of real names and information that may lead to their identification. In line with Macphail (2004), I have manipulated the roles and responsibilities of some individuals to further prevent identification. Those moments that lead to unpleasant memories are included with the aim of maintaining the integrity of the data (Madison, 2011).

3.3 FINDINGS

3.3.1 The starting point:

The following vignette is an extract taken from my reflective diary. It was written the night before I started my new role as a practitioner-researcher PhD student, and aims to provide the reader with a starting point for my development and journey on the 3-year PhD process.

So, tomorrow is the big day... I have packed my bag, laid out my tracksuit, and prepared my packed lunch. Over the last few hours I have recapped, and revised the psychological development program that I have designed, and produced an A3 mind map detailing any difficult questions I

might be asked on my big day. At this point in time, I felt confident, firstly in my ability to deliver psychological support, and secondly that it would be a beneficial addition to the academy boy's current development program. Content that I could do no more, I went downstairs and sprawled across the sofa alongside my mum and dad. Excited for me to start my new journey, they asked how I felt, and scrolled through the TV guide to find a program we could all watch.

However, it quickly became apparent that I could not hold a conversation, or focus on the TV. My mind was elsewhere. The noises in the room all merged into one messy blurr, and my gaze moved away from the screen. It was too busy, too many bright lights, too much to take in. From nowhere my anxiety built, I started to doubt what lay ahead. The only way I could think rationally was to block out all external distractions. I frantically questioned how all of this was going to play out. Simultaneously, I was trying to reassure myself that everything would be ok. All I could think was "you've survived a year; you'll get through the next three". I was delivering a mental skills intervention, to myself, albeit not that effectively. I think it is the unknown, uncertainty, and uncontrollable that had me on edge. I had signed a 3-year contract, but we all know how little this means in professional football.

Analysis

Although I had been embedded within Burrington City FC for 6 months prior to my introduction as a practitioner-researcher, it was only now that I had been handed a level of responsibility. The time had come for me to transition from a Master's student, to a professional individual working within a football club. As I sat down to watch the TV, the time for change hit me. Until now, I had been given a free shot at designing the psychological development program. By ensuring that all individuals within the club were aware that I was still 'studying', I believed that stakeholder's expectations would not be as high, and I would be given more freedom. However, I was now going

to be judged on what I had produced, and I was worried about how this would turn out. Giddens (1991) suggested that a transition offers the individual who is experiencing it the opportunity to develop strategies to deal with the real and imagined challenges that may lie ahead. As a practitioner delivering psychological support within a professional football club, my aims were as follows; to fit within the organisation and be accepted by the staff and players, to gain acceptance from key stakeholders for sports psychology as a discipline, and finally, to have a positive impact on the psychological development of players and other stakeholders. Although I had high hopes for my work, I believed that they were reasonable when I considered my experiences within the club so far, my level of sports psychology knowledge, and the three-year time frame that I had been granted.

Literature exploring the transition from student to professional has suggested that the initial period of change may pose a number of challenges for the individual to overcome (Lucey & Reay, 2000; Tod & Bond, 2007). MacNamara *et al.* (2006) supported this, and highlighted the fear and frustrations that many individuals face when starting out their career. Research within athlete career transition has supported this, and demonstrated the potential impact of transitions on an individual's identity (Mitchell *et al.*, 2014). The anticipation, anxiety, and imagination of what lay ahead resulted in me questioning whether I was ready for what I had signed up for. The uncertainty and lack of control that I felt regarding the situation initiated feelings of existential anxiety (Yalom, 1980). Tillich (1952) identified three domains of existential anxiety. However, only the second domain 'emptiness and meaninglessness' is related to this thesis. More specifically, existential anxiety in this sense refers to apprehension about the meaning of one's existence (Weems *et al.*, 2004). In contrast to previous findings in nursing, teaching, and education, my initial worries were not related to my preparation and ability as a practitioner. In contrast, I believed that I had done all

that I could, and was confident that I would be effective in my role. It was the things that I couldn't control that I was afraid of. For example, although I had signed a three-year contract, I had observed a number of staff leave the organisation, both voluntarily and involuntarily over the previous 6 months. This, coupled with the increasing media coverage regarding managerial, and staff retention rates within the game (Arnulf *et al.*, 2011) left me worried about the stability of my position.

During this period, I relied heavily on the support of those around me, particularly my family and academic supervisor. I looked to them for guidance and re-assurance. This was my first 'proper' job, and I desperately wanted to make a good impression. In line with Ronnestad & Skovholt's (2003) model on the journey of the counsellor and the therapist, I was displaying all of the characteristics of those at 'Phase 2. The Beginning Student Phase'. I was overwhelmed, and questioned whether I could really pull it off.

3.3.2 The first sucker punch

The following story illuminates my first experience of working with the parents at Burrington City FC, and explores the consequent impact of the interaction on my professional identity. The event took place 2 weeks into the season, and the workshop was titled 'An introduction to Sports Psychology'. The aim was to introduce sports psychology to the parents, inform them about the psychological development program that I had designed, and explain how it would be implemented across the upcoming season. My primary focus here was to develop a relationship with the parents in each age group, and attain their respect. The presentation to the U13/U14 parents took place from 5pm-6pm before the evening training session...

This was the first age group I tackled. I had chosen this group of parents first because they were the youngest players in the YDP (the first phase I would work with). The room was packed; some of the parents were perched on tables that had been pushed to the back of the education suite. I felt like I was back in my first school nativity, a grand gathering of judging parents in an overcrowded and humid room that smelt of stale sweat. I started the presentation eager to please, and confident in my delivery style. I knew what I was delivering, and it had been designed specifically to support those players who were contracted to Burrington City FC. Therefore, I believed that the parents would be impressed. In a further attempt to buy myself credibility, and attain their respect I made clear reference to my affiliation with Liverpool John Moores University, and playing experience in the Women's game. However, a few minutes into my presentation it was as though for some of the parents, the novelty had worn off. They took their phone out of their pockets and scrolled down their screens, my best guess was that they were looking through social media or responding to emails. I held my composure, and maintained eye contact with those individuals who were engaged. As my presentation finished the parents collectively applauded, and overall I was pleased with how it went, I felt that I had sold the program well. I had explained my role and responsibilities clearly, while demonstrating that I had a range of personal skills that were a good fit with the football club. Then came the sucker punch!

I asked the parents if they had any questions as there was still 10 minutes before training started. I had prepared beforehand for some of the questions that might be asked, and as expected, the first couple related to the availability of content for parents, and how a child could catch up if they missed a session. I felt comfortable in answering these, and their questions demonstrated to me that the parents had actually been taking note of what I was saying, and were genuinely interested in the logistics of the process. In the meantime, there was a rumbling noise coming from the back

of the room. I looked back and a couple of the dads smirked. As I made eye contact with one, he shouted, "How old are ya then? You look too young to be working with the lads, shouldn't ya still be at school". His 'pals' laughed, and so did some of the other parents scattered across the room. Taking a second to observe the audience's response, I pulled myself together. Some of the parent's eyes were on me, others on him. It felt like a standoff with the school bully, I did not want to back down and cave in; I wasn't there to be the butt of his humor. My first method of response was to pass a joke back; I commented, "At least I will be thankful when I get to your age". I was angry, frustrated, humiliated, and intimidated. I had worked so hard on the content of my presentation, as I believed that this would be the foundations of their judgement. Yet, one remark on something that I couldn't control undid everything that I believed my presentation had achieved. It was about to get worse. His mate then chirped up, it felt like the previous question had opened the door for anything... "You must be brave, you know, being a girl and all that. I wonder how that'll go down". This time I had no comeback, I drew a fake smile and told them they had better get a move on if they wanted to be outside ready for the start of training. My heart beating, head pounding, I removed my memory stick from my laptop and picked up my coat. I guess this was the first of many lessons in expecting the unexpected. I had been ridiculed on my age, and my gender, the only two things that were out of my control. A little part of me felt like giving up. If the parents went home thinking this then what would they tell their child, and more importantly, what are the implications for my future work. I had been knocked. I felt like a student, questioning my readiness for the cannibals that lurked in the real world.

Over time my relationship with these parents improved, signified by small conversations around the training ground and more frequent attendance at the sports psychology parent education workshops. As I grew more confident in interacting with them on a group and individual basis, it

felt as though their initial observations regarding my age, and my gender were no longer important. My personal characteristics, and ability to interact became the focus. For example, I did not experience another comment about how I looked, or being different to others based on uncontrollable factors.

Analysis

Prior to the start of the presentation, I believed that this was an important opportunity to attain the respect of, and establish a working relationship with the parents of players signed to Burrington City FC. Given the significant role that parent's play during childhood, and adolescence (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), I hoped that educating the parents on sports psychology topics would be an effective method of further conveying important messages to the players. Beyond this, the presentation was my chance to demonstrate value to the organisation, and above all start to feel like a real sports psychology practitioner. In my preparation, I had listed potential questions that I thought I might be asked. In this instance, I was concerned that the parents would pick up on me not being accredited, or my lack of experience at other professional football clubs. Therefore, during the presentation, I aimed to strategically combat this by emphasizing my tangible resources (Côté, 2016). For example, qualifications, affiliation with one of the best universities in the UK, and prior playing experience in professional football. In addition to this, I attempted to portray myself as a confident individual. I hoped that these mechanisms would protect the parents from questioning my own insecurities, and build their confidence in my ability to deliver the psychological development program. The use of these resources as a method of gaining acceptance from a particular group of people aligns with the ICM (Côté, 2016). The model suggests that individuals make use of a range of resources depending on the social context that they find themselves within. The more resources that are available at an individual's disposal the easier it is

for them to understand and navigate obstacles in late-modern life (p.18). An alternative theoretical framework that my experiences might be aligned with is Cultural Sport Psychology (CSP). CSP has recently been introduced within sport psychology as a lens to develop a more contextualized understanding of marginalized voices and identities (see McGannon *et al.*, 2012). In line with this, it might be suggested that those parents who commented on my age and gender were constructing a narrative/discourse that fitted within the traditional masculine culture of professional football, and behaved and discussed in that way so as to fit within the football narrative.

The first judgement I received regarding my age came as a total shock, I had not yet faced a situation like this, and my immediate reaction was to pass a comment back. I felt like I was a young player on the receiving end of the first team captains 'banter'. I didn't believe that caving in was an option. As suggested by Nesti (2010) sports psychology is traditionally viewed within professional football as feminine and weak, therefore I believed that this might have been a test of my personal character. I had to get the correct balance between showing that I could cope in the environment, but not coming across as disrespectful. Although some may have interpreted this as a lighthearted joke, to me it had a deeper meaning. It was the fact I had been judged on something that I could not control, or change. I certainly could not hold off getting a job until my face had suitably aged. However, for a significant period of time following this interaction I considered every little aspect of my appearance and whether it was suitable for my professional position within the organisation. For example, I considered how best to tie my hair up to make myself look older than I did on the day I delivered the presentation. This felt like a conflict that I needed to navigate my way through in order to develop as a professional and a person. Erikson (1968) identified a number of conflicts that individual's must successfully manage at different stages of their life in order to grow. He furthered this, and suggested that failing to successfully navigate each conflict

might have a detrimental influence on the psychological development of the individual. My encounter with this group of parents felt like a pivotal moment, I questioned my affiliation with the club, and whether I was a good fit. Prior to my entry into Burrington City FC, I believed that a professional identity would be shaped through the achievement of qualifications, and the number of clients successfully supported. However, it was moments like this that I believe were hugely influential in defining who I am as an applied practitioner.

The second comment, regarding how it “would go down” having a female within the organisation only served to anger me. They immediately casted doubt on the feasibility of a female to be successful within this environment, in my opinion I was being written off before I had even started. Having read the work of Roper (2008), I was familiar with some of the challenges that female sports psychologists may face both with relation to entering, and operating within sport settings. However, Roper’s work did not address the direct questioning of your position in an organisation solely based on gender. At the time of this event there was a lot of coverage in the media surrounding Andy Gray and Richard Keys chanting sexist and derogatory comments towards an old female colleague at Sky Sports (The Independent, 2014). In the first instance, I believed that this might have acted as a catalyst for the remarks of the parent. However, on later reflection, I struggled to find any meaningful explanation for his behavior. The event occurred at a time where I placed a focus on demonstrating my value as an individual, and understanding of the culture to gain membership into this particular social context. However, it quickly became apparent that to create a social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) I was going to have to convince people that the identity (self) I brought to the field should be accepted and respected. I felt isolated. Other than the club cook, I was the only female based at the training ground. There was no one that I could identify with. Both of my supervisors were male, and to my knowledge many of the other

individuals who occupied similar positions within football were also male. I set out hoping, and willing that gender would not be an important issue during my time within the organisation. I was slightly embarrassed about being different, and I didn't want any conflict. However, this left me feeling that it did not matter whether I was a good sports psychologist or not, what mattered was that I was not a male. I wasn't like the rest of them, and therefore I would never fit in.

3.3.3 A ghostly presence

The following vignette reflects on my relationship with a key stakeholder at Burrington City FC during my first 3 months of delivering the psychological development program. During this period, I had invested a lot of time and effort into attaining buy in from those staff who were viewed by players as pivotal to their quest of becoming a professional footballer. My rationale here was that if players thought these individuals valued me, it might consequently be easier to attain their respect. Further to this, I felt that by associating with the most valued individuals it would provide me with both a sense of belonging, and self-worth within the organisation.

Today came a bit of a breakthrough, I was actually acknowledged. For the past 3 months I have tried, tried, and tried again to develop a relationship with one particular individual at the club (Bruno), with absolutely nothing in return. It had started to get me down; he made it clear that I didn't belong with them. The first time I noticed something strange was a conversation with some of the other first team staff. Bruno was a part of the group, but refrained from passing comment on anything that was said. For an individual who can usually be heard half way down the club car park, I couldn't understand why he was so quiet. At first I questioned whether this had occurred because of my presence, however I quickly concluded that I was overthinking the event. A few days later signaled the next time we crossed paths. This time it was just the two of us, I was walking towards the gym as he stood outside on his phone. It was a mild, sunny day, and I was in a good

mood. As I got closer, I spoke, “Morning Bruno”. He glanced down at me, didn’t respond, and turned around to continue his phone call. I had been completely blanked. I carried on into the gym racking my brain for any wrong word I may have previously said, but there was nothing. This guy worked with the first team, I wasn’t a threat to his role, or his authority, so why was he acting in this way. I wasn’t brave enough to confront him, and didn’t want anybody else to notice the friction. I decided that my way of coping would be to avoid Bruno. This pattern continued for a few weeks.

Today, I was in the canteen making a cup of tea when he walked in. Immediately I felt awkward, the silence was unbearable. I decided to give it another shot. “Do you want a brew?” Bruno replied “I’ll have a coffee if that’s alright, one sweetener”. I wanted to carry on the conversation, but I wasn’t quite sure what to say. I went for something positive, something that he would relate to... “Great goal by Smithy at the weekend, I saw it on the highlights”, Bruno replied, “Yeah, he’s clinical when he’s up for it”. At this point, one of the youth development coaches entered the canteen, Bruno picked up his coffee and left. Although it was only a small interaction, it was a success. He had finally acknowledged me, but in reality, I didn’t feel as positive as I had hoped. It didn’t seem like a big deal, why?

Over the duration of my first season at the club my relationship with Bruno improved, for example we would engage in small talk, and acknowledge each other’s presence at the training ground. However, at the end of my first season, a number of staff roles were altered and Bruno lost his position of authority and power. Instead he was offered a part time role within the club with less responsibility. This acted as a turning point for our relationship. Bruno returned to the club during preseason angry about the way he had been managed. His behaviors changed, and he started to build new relationships. Bruno no longer spent time with the individuals that he had previously,

rather he invested time and effort into getting to know the academy staff, and integrated with a different range of stakeholders. He was friendlier, and over the next two years I developed a very strong relationship with Bruno. Since writing this story Bruno has parted with Burrington City FC to take on a managerial role at another football club.

Analysis

When I started out as a practitioner-researcher, I had a desire to be both well liked and well respected in my professional role. Having read literature from those with experience in professional football (e.g., Cushion, 2001; Nesti, 2010, 2012; Potrac & Jones, 2009; Roderick, 2006) I understood the importance of attaining buy in from key stakeholders, as this would allow me to operate more effectively. Researchers have further suggested that key stakeholders might be used as a vehicle to facilitate the development of relationships with players (Nesti, 2010). Unique to Burrington City FC was the overlap between the academy and the 1st team. Therefore, it was not only the academy staff that I needed to attain the respect of, I also had to work to be accepted by 1st team staff within the football club. This had become significantly more important to me following the difficult encounter I had faced with the younger player's parents. I believed that one method for me to overcome some the insecurities that had resulted from the parents' comments would be to get the most important staff at the club on my side.

Although research in sports psychology has explored the importance of developing relationships, and changing perceptions of the discipline (Birrer *et al.*, 2012; Gould *et al.*, 1991; Pain & Harwood, 2004), it is yet to explore how a practitioner's experience of doing this impacts their professional identity. My initial experiences of being rejected left me feeling frustrated. I did not want others to recognise the difficulties that I was facing, I was afraid of the subsequent influence it may have on their own behaviors towards me. In simple terms, I strived to be a part of the organisation.

However, I was struggling to cope with, and respond to the micro political workings of the club (Potrac, 2009; Roderick, 2006). As a defense mechanism, I attempted to convince myself that this might be how all new members of staff were treated, as opposed to something more personal due to my role, or the other identities that I brought to the field (Yang, 2008). The introduction of the EPPP by the Premier League had resulted in a number of new staff being introduced at the club within the sports science and medicine department, I was one of those. Given that Bruno had been in the game for over 30 years, I believed that it might be his skepticism towards the discipline that resulted in him acting the way that he did. Pain & Harwood (2004) support this view, and found that one of the most difficult barriers sports psychologists face when entering an organisation is a lack of understanding of, and reluctance to accept sports psychology as a discipline.

The decision I made to avoid Bruno was taken to further protect my already delicate identity. Each time I crossed paths with, and was ignored by him it was further confirmation that I did not belong within the organisation. I was a young individual, just starting out on my professional journey, looking for any source of capital that would build my credentials within the organisation (Côté, 2002). However, Bruno had worked his way up; he had economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Therefore, he was more influential and powerful within the organisation (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994). I was in no position to stand up to him; there was no way I could compete. I was at the beginning of my professional development, and in line with Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) I had a number of stages to progress through that would consist of challenging experiences before I reached the final phase 'The Senior Professional'. I believed that others in the organisation had reached a senior level in their field of expertise. This made my lack of experience stand out, and as a result, I had to go above and beyond to attain the respect of key stakeholders. My experiences are supported by sociologists that have explored the difficulties and challenges of the coaching

process in professional football (Armour, Jones & Potrac, 2004; Cushion, 2001). More specifically, Armour *et al.* (2004) suggested that social interaction lies at the heart of the coaching process. However, this is not simply related to the interaction between staff and players, it refers to a complex web of cultural relations in all aspects of working life.

As a result of my relationship with Bruno, I became increasingly introverted within the organisation, I chose to hide away from challenging situations (e.g., challenging the beliefs of key stakeholders). However, I soon realised that this was equally as damaging as facing up to the reality of the world that I was operating within. When I eventually plucked up the courage to speak to Bruno in the canteen, it didn't leave me with the positive emotions that I had imagined. In contrast, I felt nothing. In one instant, I had gone from letting this have a significant impact on how I viewed myself, and consequently how I behaved, to questioning why all of this bothered me in the first instance.

3.3.4 Scholars Bus

For my first season of work with Burrington City FC I travelled by train to the club's local railway station, here I caught the minibus with the scholars to the training ground. It was just me, the bus driver, and a full squad of 16, 17, and 18-year-old adolescent boys. Over the duration of the season, this journey with the players had a significant impact in shaping my professional identity. The following vignette illuminates an interaction with one of the second year scholars that consequently led to further individual support sessions with him. This narrative is representative of my experiences of the journey to and from the training ground across time.

We were all stood in huddle, like a group of penguins in the Antarctic waiting for Gary to pull up in the minibus. Toes numb, fingers blue, and teeth chattering, it was absolutely freezing. I'd been

waiting about half an hour, and so had some of the scholars that travelled on the same train. There was no shelter; we took the full force of the howling wind. What felt like a lifetime later, the big red bus swung around the corner, Gary grinning in the driver's seat as he honked the horn.

I was first on, grabbed my usual front row window seat, and sat on my hands in the hope of warming them up. The lads scuttled on behind, pushing each other out of the way to escape the cold. Some of the scholars headed for the back row, while others sat on the first seat they saw. Ash (a popular second year scholar) slid his bag next to mine and sat down. I had a good relationship with this player, and had previously worked with him on an individual basis to develop his emotional control. Ash asked if I was going to the game on Saturday, I didn't travel to the away games but told him that I would be at the home game the week after. His next comment really struck a chord with me "there's not too many games left now, I've been thinking a lot about what's gonna happen if I don't get a pro. America isn't for me, I would rather stay around here. I mean if you don't make it in England, you probably don't have much chance anywhere else. I was speaking to my Dad about it last night, cause I did my UCAS and stuff but it's a bit... scary you know like not knowing what's coming next. I signed here when I was 8" I nodded, but didn't respond in the hope that Ash would continue speaking, it worked, "So I was thinking, could you help me out with it a bit. I don't mean sort stuff out for me, but like can you try and help me figure out what my options are, and how to deal with how I'm feeling. Like some days I come in all motivated, and I think about my body language in training and stuff, and you feel these should be the best few weeks of your life. But then others its hard, cause you're just thinking what's the point in me doing all this extra if the coaches know they're gonna release me" We were now getting close to the training ground, I wanted to show Ash that I empathized with his situation. I told him that I had some free time between lunch and their scheduled gym session, and he could come into

the office for a more detailed chat. But first, I thanked Ash for telling me his thoughts/feelings and reassured him that we would tackle his situation together. I wanted him to feel as though he was not alone. The bus pulled into the training ground, the lads departed and we went in our separate ways. I was no longer in their environment, operating on their terms. I was now back in the world where they had to conform to the manager, and I was a further figure of authority. This meant that we no longer operated on the same level, players were required to follow and listen to my instructions, and I was required to discipline them if appropriate.

Analysis

During the first season, my experiences of travelling to and from the training ground on the scholar's bus were more beneficial for my personal and professional development than I ever could have imagined. The bus signaled my time with the players away from the organisation. This was their opportunity to get to know me as a person, and the same worked vice versa. I made a conscious effort to remove the structural and hierarchical difference between us, and encouraged the players to communicate as though they were on the same level as myself. Sports psychology researchers have commented on the importance of brief contact interventions in facilitating the development of existing relationships, and supporting clients at the moments they may need it the most (Collins *et al.*, 2013; Giges & Petitpas, 2000; McCann, 2000). However, to date there has not been an exploration of the importance of these moments for the psychological development and identity formation of the sports psychology practitioner.

In moving away from Burrington City FC's training ground, and the culture that existed within it, I felt more in my comfort zone, and in turn, I believed that what I presented was an authentic version of myself (Taylor, 1992). I did not have to behave in accordance with the values and beliefs

of the organisation; I could be true to me. For example, unlike when I was positioned at the training ground, on the scholars bus I didn't feel pressured to engage in the banter or belittling of other individuals within the group in order to prevent myself from being categorized as mentally weak. What mattered more now were the personal characteristics that I had developed based on my life experiences to date, my ability to take part in general conversations, and finally, the delivery of short but meaningful interventions to the players (Andersen, 2000). In line with Côté (2016) suggestions, I was using those resources that fitted with the social context that I found myself in. Players involving me with their conversations, and seeking my advice psychologically made me feel valued amongst this group of individuals. Over time, I was learning what did and didn't work, and was establishing and refining my skills as a sports psychology practitioner. Being exposed to different scenarios encouraged me to make quick decisions based on the client's needs. I became more confident in thinking of my own solutions informed by theory, as opposed to relying on ensuring that everything I said was directly in line with literature on the topic. This is in line with Skovholt and Ronnestad's (1992) model on professional development, and the transition from the advanced student phase to the early professional phase. This is signaled by the movement from rigid interventions towards a focus on personal characteristics and establishing a relationship with the client. I felt comfortable in this world and enjoyed the distance it provided, it was a more relaxed environment. It also worked in my favor for the more difficult scenarios I was faced with, such as the one described in the vignette. Being on the bus gave me the option to think about a situation before meeting with a player again later in the day. However, as the bus pulled into the training ground and we went our separate ways both the players and myself needed to act in congruence with the culture as opposed to our own values and beliefs.

3.3.5 Power, Dominance, and Control

The events that are described below relate to my relationship with another individual at Burrington City FC, and proved to be the beginning of some of the most challenging experiences that I would face during my time at the club. The following vignettes aim to illuminate the impact of these challenges on my identity as a sports psychology practitioner, and identity within the organisation. The first encounter occurred prior to an afternoon weights session for the U18s, U23s, and 1st team, meaning that all players within these age groups and respective sports science staff were in the gym at the time.

I'm stood in the gym, the most masculine area of the training ground, although somewhat intimidating I feel a sense of comfort and security. It is here where each male boasts his rugged, red-blooded dominance. It's the afternoon, the busiest part of the day, U23 players, 1st team players, and sports science staff congregate in preparation for the start of an afternoon gym session. Matt (1st team fitness coach) enters the gym and his eyes fixate on myself and the player I was talking to (like a lion looking at his prey). Matt spoke, "OI Francesca... I need to speak to you about your progress", the clanging metal came to a halt, and silence filled the air. All eyes were on me, my face beating as the blood rushed to my burning red cheeks. I somehow plucked up the courage to confidently respond, "Yeah of course, when are you free?" ... Matt's bellowing voice delivered the next embarrassing blow "I'll find you when I've got time". He then turned around, and without looking back left the gym. I spent the next hour riddled with anxiety, Matt finally approached me and suggested we talk in his office (shared with 1st team manager and assistant manager). His opening tone was overwhelmingly negative, and I couldn't help but compare my feelings to those I experienced when asked to report to the Head teacher's office in primary school. I was isolated, alone, and lacking any control over the situation I found myself in.

However, what came next would serve to enhance these feelings further. In a cold, harsh tone, Matt demanded that I remove my email address and contact number from any document that could be seen by the academy or 1st team players. I was stunned... the gym boasted an overly large notice board, pinned to this was a personal profile of all staff working at the club (each one gave a contact number and email address). I mumbled, hoping for a positive response “my role within the club means that occasionally contact with the players outside of club hours is vital”. Matt responded, “You’re a female, you don’t need to be contacting anyone outside your allocated hours”. Head down I shrank into my seat, hoping that somehow it would swallow me up and this encounter would end.

Just as I perceived myself to be at breaking point, the door barged open, no knock... nothing. James (1st team manager) entered. With a welcoming smile on his face, he spoke “Hi Fran, how are you finding things so far? You seem to be settling in well, we’re all happy with how you’re doing”, I put on a brave face, and lied. I said that things were going really well, and I was starting to feel a part of the club. I glanced quickly back to Matt, worried what he may say next. However, it was now Matt who looked nervous, and even embarrassed. I took lead in the conversation and explained my plan of action for the following month. The tension had diminished; it was as though the opening of the office door brought with it a presence that had a holding effect on Matt. Not only was he smiling, he agreed with what I was suggesting, and spoke in soft, quiet tone of voice. The conversation came to a natural end. I left the office, a mix of emotions running wildly through my head... I took my details off the notice board, and decided it would be best to take some time alone to try and make sense of what had just happened.

6 months later...

I am based in the sports science office, only accessible via the gym. The office is shared between myself, and three other members of staff. Therefore, other than the player/staff lunch break it is often difficult to get the opportunity to sit in the office and have a private consultation with a player. It had become common knowledge within the club that when the office door was closed I was delivering an individual support session to a player. However, on the rare occasion when a player or member of staff needed to speak to me during this time they would either knock before entering, or leave a message with the academy sport scientist. The encounter occurred during the club lunch break, I was in the sports science office working with an U18 player (Joe). I worked with this player at the same time each week and the session started as normal.

This player had given up an hour of his lunchbreak to ensure that we could have the session privately in the sports science office. He knew that his other option was keeping his lunch break but compromising on the location of the session. I appreciated this, and always made sure I showed the same commitment back to Joe. The session was ten minutes in, and both parties were fully engaged. Suddenly the door flung open, there was no knock, no warning. Both the player and I jumped, a light sweat covered my body, a physical reaction to the unexpected shock. My cognitive reaction was no less intense; I saw red... it was an angry red. Matt (1st team fitness coach) entered. As Matt glanced around, Joe went silent, huffed, and slumped in his chair. A mix of thoughts running through my head; how would this affect my relationship with Joe, was he ok, was I ok, and at the forefront WHAT WAS MATT DOING. I tried to remain calm, I was in disbelief. Matt had now been glancing around the office for what felt like a lifetime, although in reality it was only a few seconds. I took a deep breath and decided it was time to say something, this was my time, the time no one interrupted, the time I relied on. That something didn't turn out to be very

significant, all I could manage was a blunt “alright?” before I quickly gritted my teeth and held in the more aggressive response I wish I could have let out. He turned his head, looked down to me and said, “I was just looking for something”. This only served to heighten my anger. He doesn’t have anything of his in the office, the 1st team did not have an afternoon gym or training session, and it was supposed to be his lunch break. I did not respond and Matt left, not even shutting the door behind him. As I got up to close the door Joe looked at me and swore about Matt. No matter how much I wanted to join in, I tried to maintain my professionalism. I rolled my eyes and apologized on Matt’s behalf. I asked if Joe wanted to continue the session and recapped what had been discussed so far. He still seemed keen, but despite this, I felt vacant. It was as though all of the progress I had made with this player had been unraveled. Nothing felt familiar, the room didn’t feel secure anymore, and I felt an immediate distance between Joe and myself. My confidence was shattered and I was battling my own demons whilst trying to support Joe through his. Unsurprisingly, the remainder of the session didn’t go to plan.

As the session ended and Joe closed the office door I didn’t go and join the other staff in the canteen. I wanted to be alone, away from the club and the world within it. I was disappointed in what had just happened, and afraid of the long-term consequences it may have. Not only had Matt undermined me, he had showed a clear lack of respect regarding my role at the club.

Learning to cope

It was my last opportunity to see the U18 players before they finished for the off-season. Feeling confident that I was where I needed to be with each individual in this age group I decided to approach Matt about the training schedule for the U23s whilst the U18s were away. I still felt a little intimidated by him, and therefore was sure to approach him when no players were around. I didn’t want the players to see a negative reaction from Matt towards myself, after all I had been

embarrassed enough times by this individual. I asked whether it would be better for me to work with the U23s in the morning or afternoon to fit around their already hectic schedule. Matt explained that the training loads were being reduced from Monday and therefore they would be free every afternoon.

Monday...

I approached Matt before the U23s reported for training and asked him what the plan for the day was. Matt seemed rushed off his feet and abruptly stated they are doing testing today. Not wanting to get in his way, but also needing to know where I stood I asked what it meant in relation to my work with them. He half answered whilst walking towards the door “you can’t have them today”. Part of me felt like thanking him, thanking him for the fact I had come in for nothing. However, the other part of me understood that this might be out of his control. Why was I beginning to feel sorry for Matt. As I walked back to the sports science office I was frustrated that my chance to speak with the players had been taken away from me, but I was not frustrated by the lack of communication by Matt. Not long after, I was walking through the canteen when one of the U23 players shouted, “Are we seeing you today then?” I explained to the player that he was testing all day. He looked surprised and said, “I’ll find you in my lunch break then if you’re free”. I told him I would be free all day. This was a player that I only saw once per month, and therefore it felt like a real achievement to have him put my session above his lunch. It not only made me smile, but it provided reassurance that despite Matt pushing my work to one side the players did see me as important.

Analysis

This was one of the most challenging series of events that occurred within my first season at Burrington City FC. I felt isolated, and distant from the club, particularly this one individual. I couldn't understand why I was being treated in the way that I was, I had never done or said anything out of turn, and had always maintained my professionalism. Following the first event, I was made to feel like I was not good enough to be in the role. Although Matt was not my manager, and had no direct impact on my day-to-day position within the organisation, his behaviors had a significant influence on my sense of self. I was anxious, isolated, and living in fear of the next encounter. Yalom (1980) supported this and suggested that isolation is an existential given, and that in some way it is ever present to our being.

As time went on and things did not improve I considered departing the organisation. A feeling of absence, and emptiness overwhelmed me. It no longer felt as though I was fully present. I was only exposing a part of myself, in the hope that the rest of me would be protected from what I was experiencing. My thoughts and emotions resonate with the findings of Ronkainen *et al.* (2014) who described the isolation that she experienced during her time in Beijing as not being due to missing friends or family, rather because of a lack of understanding and an estrangement of meaning from the situations that she found herself in. The more I tried to understand the situation, the more difficult it became to internalize what I was experiencing. I felt as though I may be the victim of something bigger.

Demonstrated in the story titled 'learning to cope' the time came when I decided that I needed to dig in, and get through the situation. I wanted to maintain my honor and integrity, but I knew that if my experiences with Matt were to continue in the same manner, it would be the end of my role within the organisation, and the broader consequences of this were unthinkable. I would have the

chance of studying for a PhD taken away from me, and I would no longer be working in the sport that deep down I was so passionate about. Growing up, the people around me had always commented on how determined I was as an individual. I couldn't let them down, especially my family. My mind-set started to change, and no matter what Matt said to me, I had decided he was not going to break me. In the last incident, I considered the broader picture as opposed to focusing solely on how I had been spoken to by one individual. I reminded myself why the club had employed me, and the main objective was to support the psychological development of the players. Therefore, I began to use the client-practitioner relationship as a judgement of my effectiveness (Anderson *et al.*, 2004; Partington & Orlick, 1987).

Reflective stop off 1.

The reflections that have been detailed so far all occurred within my first season operating as a sports psychology practitioner-researcher within Burrington City FC. In summary, my first year had been an incredibly challenging experience, but I had made it through. Many of the challenges were not related to the delivery of the psychological support program, or interventions with individual players. Rather, it was developing and sustaining relationships within the professional football culture that I found most difficult. I had been subject to the traditional masculine, and authoritarian management style frequently referred to within psychological and sociological literature (Gilbourne & Richardson 2004; Nesti, 2004, 2010, 2012; Parker, 1995, 1996, 2001, 2002; Roderick, 2006). At times I felt particularly vulnerable, and was left questioning whether it would be possible to move forward. What follows are a series of reflections on my second, and final season within the professional football club.

3.3.6 The parting of an ally

Today I returned for pre-season to be greeted with the news that the head of the EPPP and head of YDP coaching (Dave) had parted with Burrington City FC. He had progressed to a more senior coaching role with another professional football club. My immediate reaction was to consider the potential implications of this for me. Dave was a well-educated individual and had pursued other avenues in life before taking on the coaching role at Burrington City FC. He was the individual behind me being offered the position, and had fully supported me during meetings with the coaches, and a presentation that I delivered to the club chairman. Beyond this, Dave spoke to and involved me with everything that was going on, it was obvious that he had come from an alternative world, and made me feel normal for being the same. Further to this, Dave was the only individual, especially coach who had displayed any interest in my role as an academic. I felt as though I had lost an ally, and that now I would have to break barriers and prove my effectiveness alone as opposed to with the help of a senior figure. Dave was big on sports psychology, perhaps stemming from his own experiences as a footballer, but whenever I asked him about this he expressed that his interest stemmed from observations of players struggling to cope in the environment.

3 Months on...

My PhD has been cast to one side, ignored by the staff as a valueless and unimportant accompaniment to my role as sports psychology practitioner. They made it clear that I was employed by the club with one role; to provide psychological support. One of the members of staff highlighted this when he saw me emailing my supervisor during a break in the day. He commented, "do you really need to do another degree? These things count for nothing in the real world". The fight is on for sports psychology not to be viewed the same way. Earlier this week the new head of academy operations (Pete) called a meeting with the sports science and medicine team. To date,

all of these had been to review current practice, or incorporate an idea from himself or the coaches that would 'lead to the development of a better department'. Reluctantly, we arranged the meeting for later that afternoon. It was a busy time of the season, and therefore neither I nor the other members of the sports science team had the time spare for another hour's session with no real aim or purpose. The meeting started, and Pete's first statement told the sports scientist (Alex) in no uncertain terms that he, and the coaches believed that the U16 age group were not physically prepared for a full time scholarship. I felt for Alex, he was also relatively new to the organisation and looked confused and saddened by Pete's remarks, but I was also glad I had swerved the first bullet. He then told Alex that he needed to do an extra gym session with the players each week, and that this was to be conducted outside because it is "more relevant to what they do on a pitch". Given the already hectic schedule that myself and the sports science team operate around, and the lack of available space to conduct the sessions, Alex said that it was not viable unless he went into the players allocated coaching hours. I had a strong feeling of what was to come next, this was going to fall on my head. It did. Pete looked across to me, "I get the psychology stuff is important, but can't you just do that with them when they get their scholar, and carry on with your stuff with the U13s and 14s". Blood boiling, I was ready to tell this guy how I felt. However, Alex stepped in. "You can't just let the players miss two years of psychology and expect them to pick it back up unscathed when they start their scholarship. It does not work like that. We work as a team, around each other. I don't think the players, or the parents would take that very well either". Alex had communicated the message much better than I would have done at that moment in time. Pete murmured "sort it out between yourselves, I've told you what we want so it needs to happen". As he walked off we shook our heads, both of us felt aggrieved. He had questioned the effectiveness of Alex's job, and diminished any importance of sports psychology. For the past year, I had been

fighting an uphill battle, but this guy had introduced an impenetrable wall, limiting my role and its value.

Analysis

The departure of Dave from the organisation made my consequent interactions with the coaching staff more difficult. I had worked tirelessly and at times thanklessly during the first season to put the program into place, and educate those individuals within Burrington City FC on the importance of sports psychology as a discipline. In line with the suggestions of Harwood (2008), I used education as a method of changing attitudes, and altering behaviors. This was the case not only with the players, but with the staff and parents also. Dave had been a bridge between the sports science and medicine department, and the coaching team, and he was my go to man when I needed to ask for more time with a group of players. Although I knew that things would be different when he left, I had a strong belief that I had put foundations in place for the program to continue in the same manner that it had been.

The event that occurred 3 months down the line took me back to square one, the new head of the EPPP was an ex-professional footballer who had not long retired from the game. He entered the organisation with a number of his own thoughts and ideas about how things should be done, and some of these were not congruent with the current working practices of the sports science and medicine department. Although it was the physical aspect of the player's development that he was not satisfied with, the psychological development program was the first to be removed. My interpretation of this was that Pete, and the coaches believed the psychological component of the young player's development was the least important. I felt as though the club only employed me because it was a necessity for them to maintain their EPPP category status, this was something that was difficult to deal with. Louis (1980, p.229) used the term organisational socialization to explain

thoughts and feelings such as the above. He suggested that organisational socialization is a process that might be experienced by individuals within an organisation, and is the degree to which an individual adjusts to a specific role, and participates as an organisational member (Chao *et al.*, 1994). I was not valued, and most often cast aside. This had been demonstrated clearly by Pete. He did not present his message in a sensitive or considerate manner; he was clear, blunt, and brutally honest. After navigating my way through the challenges of the first season I now faced a new challenge.

Reflective stop off 2.

It is important to make the reader aware of the organisational change that occurred during the next 2 years of my time working for Burrington City FC. In my second season at the club, two of the academy physiotherapists, the head of academy sports science and medicine, the 1st team sport scientist, and two academy sport scientists departed from the club. This was nearly all of the original members of the sports science and medicine team, and some of the individuals who I identified most strongly with within the organisation. However, my final season saw an even greater level of change. The 1st team manager, his assistant, the new 1st team sport scientist, the academy sport scientist, and the club's longest standing physio parted ways with Burrington City FC. As my time at the club came to an end, I was the only remaining member of the academy sports science and medicine team that was employed before the introduction of the EPPP. The staffing changes resulted in a significant period of change for all of those who operated within the club. A number of new staff were employed (head of academy operations, academy scouts, academy coaches, sports scientists), and consequently the culture of the club was shifting towards the values and beliefs of the new stakeholders. For example, the staff no longer sat and ate lunch together in the canteen, individuals ate their food in their office when they had some free time. I

had to learn to adjust to the different ways of operating. In line with CSP, the shift in the culture of the professional football club was demonstrated by the narrative stakeholders communicated within the organisation (Tibbet *et al.*, 2014), and it was becoming more apparent that for both staff and players that the only way to be successful would be to embrace the cultural norms and traditions of the club. The final two reflections represent my experiences within Burrington City FC following the organisational changes, and during my final 6 months.

3.3.7 Left feeling like a naughty child

The following reflection details an event that occurred with the new U18 manager (Tony) following an individual support session with a second year scholar. As noted above, there has been a significant period of organisational change within the club, and therefore Tony was promoted to his current position following only a short period of time with Burrington City FC. His transition to the U18 manager had coincided with a turn in form for the U18 team. Having entered the Christmas period second in the table with a game in hand, they had not won any of the first 10 games with Tony in charge. This was proving to be a difficult time for both the staff, and players involved with the club.

A number of the scholars had approached me in the last couple of months regarding a range of challenging situations that had occurred because of the organisational change at the club. I decided to sit down with each player individually and attain their perception on what was going wrong, and how I could best support them through this transitional period. One of the players (Tom) disclosed that he had been meaning to speak to Tony for a few weeks regarding his progress but didn't know how best to approach him. Tom had not started one U18 game since Tony took charge, but had played a couple of games down with the U16 age group, despite being one the taller, more physical scholars. He was a quiet, shy individual, and based on previous experiences

I believed that his account of the story would be accurate. Therefore, when he mentioned that his feedback in training was good, and that his attitude had remained professional despite his lack of opportunity I was also confused as to why he was being treated this way. Tom further mentioned that he was growing increasingly frustrated with the manager not giving him a chance when he took into account the U18s most recent results. As a consequence of this, his motivation was low, and on a couple of occasions he had thought about 'pulling a sickie' to give him a break from the club. He set off at 7am to get two different trains and the scholar's bus to ensure that he would make the training ground for 9.30am; he then had the same journey home, 6 days per week. Tom told me that he was investing 72 hours a week into training, and travelling to and from the club for no reward, and that if he could not even make the bench for the U18 age group then what was the point in him continuing with the second year of his scholarship. I could not disagree, but I also could not change the situation, it was only the manager who made these decisions. I encouraged Tom to speak to Tony himself to better understand the situation he found himself in. Tom looked down, he told me that he couldn't. He had been trying for a few weeks, but he didn't dare, he was scared of coming across in the wrong way and making the situation worse. He then commented, "Would you mind just mentioning to him that I'm a bit confused about my game time and see what he says?"

My own relationship with Tony was poor, but I didn't want the lads to recognise this. I knew that Tony would take this badly, but I guess at least I would be the brunt of his aggressive rant as opposed to Tom, who was already feeling bad enough about himself. I sat and considered how to approach him. Tony is best described as a tall, well-built, masculine ex-professional player with clear and overpowering old school views on how things should be done... Hesitantly, I knocked on Tony's door and asked for a quick word, I was not yet comfortable in this person's presence so I

stood using the door as a comfort blanket. He didn't look up; he remained engrossed in his phone.

"I've spent the last half an hour or so with Tom, I've been reviewing the season so far with all of the players, but I was concerned about a couple of Tom's responses. He seems confused with his progress, and doesn't understand why he is playing U16s football. The aim of this isn't for him to get a starting position, but for him to understand what he needs to do to give himself a better chance, whether that's in training or away from the club". I could see Tony going red in the face, aggressively he stated "Right ok. I'll pull him in now! He can't be questioning that, if he's not happy he can go, and I'll tell him that. I will tell him that straight, no messing!... They get given a scholar and then they think the club owes them everything. You tell him, and the rest of em that if they want to moan about not playing then they can go, we don't want them here!" I calmly waited for him to finish, I half expected this response, and so I responded "no, I don't think you understand what I said, Tom is confused about why he isn't starting and wants to understand what he can do to give him a better chance of attaining a starting place, its nothing to do with him thinking he warrants a place because he has been given a scholar". He sat back into his chair, huffed, puffed, and put his hands on the back of his head, "he isn't good enough, he will never play for the first team, so does he expect me to start him now when he's got no chance, the lad should never have been given a scholar". He shook his head, paused again, and then added "and if any of the others come to you and say they're not happy with anything, and I mean anything, you tell me and I'll sort them out, I'll fine them". I tried again to say that he had the wrong end of the stick, but he swiveled his chair and grunted into his phone. Conversation over.

As I walked out of the room, part of me was panicked about what he might say to the player. What would be the impact of this for my relationship both with Tom and the rest of the boys? But most importantly, I left the office feeling like a player myself who had just been exposed to Tony's

authoritarian and masculine management style. I was intimidated, belittled, and sure that I wouldn't approach him again. This was no longer the environment for me, and as time went on, I was beginning to feel more and more alone and isolated. Although the players sought support from me, I sought just as much support and re-assurance from them. I felt as though we identified with each other, and for now, these were my only allies.

Analysis

If I had experienced this event at the start of my PhD journey I am sure that I would not be analyzing it using the same words that I do now, I feel it would have posed a much greater threat to my identity. However, given the organisational change and consequent cultural change that was taking place within Burrington City FC I no longer felt a burning desire to be accepted as part of the organisation, or to establish relationships with key stakeholders. In fact, it was now the opposite. Although I was listed as a club employee, I purposefully sought differences between myself and the organisation (Kelman, 1958). I had enough confidence to be content with myself as an independent individual. I had my own beliefs and values that were different to those of the professional football club; player welfare and equality was of paramount importance to me. I disagreed with the barbaric and brutal manner in which both players and staff were being treated. I sought to work with, and alongside those individuals who I valued as people, as opposed to because of how their role within the organisation may be beneficial for myself. In line with Yang (2008), my recent negative experiences of organisational socialization and disagreement with the club's values, and expected behaviors (Louis, 1980) resulted in a low level of organisational commitment (Fogarty, 2000). I felt alone, but I was ok with this, it felt more authentic. The truth is, I was scared of Tony, and I certainly wouldn't approach him about something similar again, but this had not left me questioning my belonging. I had accepted that for a number of reasons those

new to the club were not likely to buy in to sports psychology straight away, and they may demonstrate a lack of understanding of complex topics (Pain & Harwood, 2004). I was not willing to put myself through the uphill battle of trying to get these stakeholders on my side.

I only had 6 months of my journey left, therefore I was looking beyond the institution and towards what came next. My confidence as a sports psychology practitioner was higher than it had been previously, in line with Ronnestad and Skovholt I was no longer in the ‘beginning student phase’ and did not rely on my supervisors support. I had just been granted BASES accreditation, and this was a significant stepping-stone in helping me to believe in myself. My tangible, and intangible resources were now more in line with the novice professional phase (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003), for example, I was more comfortable in expressing my own personality, and acting in accordance with my philosophical underpinning. Beyond this, I had developed strong working relationships with players throughout the age groups, these were now more important to me than staff politics, ultimately my service was delivered with the aim of supporting the psychological development of the academy players. I enjoyed and valued my interactions with the players, and used these as the opportunity for me to develop my applied portfolio, and become the best practitioner that I could be. Further to this, I had developed a number of resources that could be used beyond the football club, and my professional identity now incorporated much more than just my role at Burrington City FC.

Despite, being less affected by the situation I was conscious of the impact that this encounter may have on the players, especially if Tony confronted Tom. I understood the situation that they found themselves in, and wanted to protect them from an unnecessary result. I understood that these players needed to be exposed to challenging situations to facilitate their personal growth. However, I also believed that they needed appropriate support mechanisms to help guide them through the

process. Tony had displayed a lack of understanding of sports psychology as a discipline, and his body language demonstrated a lack of respect towards myself as an individual. He spoke to me in the same manner that he would speak to a player; I was no different.

3.3.8 “A beer in one hand on a beach in Maga”

The final vignette presents an encounter with one of the physiotherapists at the club (Richard). This individual had been positioned within the organisation for just over a year, and although our relationship started strong, I felt that Richard’s behaviors, and attitude had changed in accordance with the club’s organisational changes to promote his own development. I no longer identified with some of his actions, and the following situation illuminates an example of this, and how it impacted my professional identity. The story took place the morning after an U23 game. The squad reported to the gym for a cool down session.

I was sat in my office, the window facing out into the gym. I could see the U23 age group gathered in a circle on the mats. Richard was doing a headstand. He then asked the players to copy, shouting that it was a proven method of recovery. Amused by the situation I smiled to myself and carried on with my paperwork. Suddenly the gym went silent, and Richard bellowed to one of the U18 players “Get off the treadmill!!! You’re going to ruin the atmosphere”. I peeked out of the window to see Richard stood by the speaker, next came the calming sound of waves hitting the shore. This was a stark contrast to the hip hop/rap music that usually blasted through the speakers at such a volume that my desk shook. I poked my head around the corner and asked “What’s all this about?”, he told me that he was doing meditation with the players. “You can’t be serious” I replied, before withdrawing back into the hole from which I emerged. Meditation... SERIOUSLY! Since when was he qualified to deliver this, ohh and nice of him to ask for my advice. Ultimately, I am responsible for the delivery of any psychological mechanism to this group of players... never

mind. My mindset had moved away from the club, I was looking to the end of the season and my exit from the organisation. I'd given up on arguing against such occurrences, I did not have the time or motivation to change perceptions anymore. It was best to let it pass.

Next thing, Richard asked the players to lie on the floor and close their eyes (he was looking at his phone to follow a step-by-step guide). I could not believe what I was hearing. He asked them to breathe in and out slowly, and following a prolonged period in which players started to open their eyes and look at each other. The physio's next phrase had me flabbergasted "pretend you're on a beach in Maga with a beer in one hand, think about how chilled out you feel". At this point, I erupted with laughter at my office desk, as did a few of the players. Richard quickly wrapped up the session, and the players bolted for the pool. I was still in disbelief, and wanted to understand what Richard's rationale was behind this intervention. As I walked into the gym I glanced across at him and jokingly asked "what was all that about?" his response "it was class, the lads loved it". I shook my head not daring take the conversation any further. I knew that any further comment would not result in a rational discussion, rather him berating me with abusive language regarding his role of authority as head of sports science and medicine. As I left the gym I decided to take a detour and have a quick walk around the pitches to clear my head. I was now my own person separate from the organisation, things had changed, and I had changed. The gym no longer signified a unit of strong willed individuals that would support each other to deliver their role effectively. In fact, the opposite, something that to me was strange and distant.

Analysis

I was totally embarrassed by what Richard had delivered to the U23 age group. It was obvious that it had not been well received by the players, but this wasn't important to me. What meant something was the lack of respect that he had demonstrated towards sports psychology, and my

position within the organisation. It didn't come as a surprise, but I also did not understand what Richard was hoping to achieve by delivering a combined 'yoga and meditation session'. Although I believed that Richard didn't mean for this to be in any way offensive to myself, I wasn't sure how he would take it if I decided to deliver a rehab session to the injured players. Despite not being as motivated as when I first started out, I still took pride in my role, and the psychological development program that I was delivering. Sports psychology researchers, and practitioners (Larsen, 2013; Nesti, 2012; Pain & Harwood, 2004) have passed comment on the reluctance of professional football clubs to employ sports psychologists. This has generally been attributed to the perceptions of those within clubs, and the delivery methods of those who have been given a chance. Richard had mocked the discipline when he asked them to imagine 'being on the beach with a beer in one hand', and supported the reasons for its limited acceptance. It was as though each different encounter served as a further push towards the door. At first I was so eager to impress, I didn't feel this way anymore. I aimed to attain my personal value from the presentation of research at academic conferences, and the delivery of sports psychology support in different sport settings.

3.4 SUMMARY

The narratives within this chapter were presented chronologically across the three-year time frame that I was employed as a practitioner-researcher at Burrington City FC. Each individual story explored a critical moment that had a significant impact on my personal and professional identity (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011). Taken together, the narratives provide a representation of my general experiences within this social context. In the last decade, there has been an increase in the publication of reflective articles by neophyte sports psychology practitioners (e.g., Collins et al., 2013; Lindsay et al., 2007; Owton et al., 2013; Tod & Bond, 2010). However, this chapter adds a

longitudinal perspective where I (the applied practitioner) was embedded within the organisation on a full time basis. Additionally, identity was placed as the central focus of the analysis, and therefore builds upon the suggestions of Williams and Andersen (2012) by adding a longitudinal approach to practitioner identity development. Over the three years, my identity did not develop in a smooth or linear pattern. In contrast, it was a rocky road signified by several challenging experiences that required me to reflect on my sense of self, and employ a range of resources dependent on the situations that I was exposed to. My beliefs, values, and behaviors as a sports psychology practitioner were shaped as a result of this.

Prior to entering the field my primary focus was on establishing and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders at Burrington City FC. This approach was supported by discussions with my supervisory team, and previous literature (Pain & Harwood, 2004). For example, Nesti (2010) identified the important role that the head coach or manager plays in the acceptance and integration of sports psychology. However, in reality, this was significantly more difficult than I anticipated. Examples include my interactions with Bruno (3.3.3 *A ghostly presence*), and difficult relationship with Matt (3.3.5 *Power, Dominance Control*). Each of these events occurred at a time where I was in the process of organisational socialization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). As noted previously, organisational socialization refers to the phase where a new employee learns the desired rules of a particular role, and acquires the knowledge and understanding to successfully function within that role (Phillips et al., 2015; Saks & Ashforth, 1979). The desired result of organisational socialization is for an outsider to be integrated as an organisational insider. Phillips *et al.* (2015) explored the process of organisational socialization in a group of graduate nurses, and suggested that the personality traits of the individual coupled with organisational support were the key determinants of effective socialization. However, in my experiences at Burrington City FC, it was

not only personality traits, it was also uncontrollable personal characteristics (e.g., age and gender) that had a significant influence on the socialization process. Although I was aware of some of the difficulties that I may face from reading the work of Roper (2008), and Nesti (2010, 2012), experiencing them on a first hand basis posed a significant threat and challenge to my identity. My feelings of isolation and rejection were all the more pressing due to the desire that I had to be accepted and well-liked by those affiliated with Burrington City FC. In line with the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), I invested time in highlighting the similarities between myself and other desirable individuals within the organisation and maximized the differences between myself and other out-groups (Kelman, 1958; Tajfel, 1982).

However, as a function of my experiences over time, I no longer placed the same importance on being accepted. The departure of a number of staff from Burrington City FC during my second year resulted in a period of significant organisational change (Morrell, et al., 2004). The philosophy of the club shifted, as did a number of the daily working practices. For example, discipline and authority played a much bigger role, and staff no longer interacted on the same level as previously. This was demonstrated by the narrative and discourse of new staff members within the organisation (McGannon *et al.* 2012). It was my belief that the environment was now more individualized, resulting in a culture of mistrust (Woodman, 1989). Research by Pasmore and Fagans (1992) suggested that this places significant limitations on an organisation as a whole, and that those employed within need to devote energy and attention to combining both individual and organisational development. For me personally, my priorities shifted. I placed increasing value on the player's perceptions of my work; ultimately I was employed by Burrington City FC to deliver a psychological development program. I began to see the bigger picture. For example, a challenging encounter with a member of 1st team staff no longer resulted in the same anxiety and

feelings of loss that I had described previously. In contrast, I looked to other areas of my life, beyond Burrington City FC for social inclusion and identification. I wanted to be valued by those I was working most closely with because of the quality of my work. As a result of this, I was behaving in a manner that was more authentic to me. Despite being more authentic, in line with Côté (2016) suggestions I employed different resources that were appropriate to the situations that I found myself in e.g. contrast between the scholar's bus and the training ground.

My final season at Burrington City FC was represented by a significant shift in my sense of self. Further organisational change at both academy and 1st team level meant that a number of barriers that I faced during the first season returned. For example, negative perceptions, and a lack of knowledge and understanding (Pain & Harwood, 2004). However, I had now built up a significant amount of applied experience within a range of other sports, and my academic career was progressing. Burrington City FC was no longer my primary focus, over the three years I had developed a range of other tangible and intangible resources (Côté, 2016) that I believed were as valuable as my experience within Burrington City FC. In stark contrast to my first season, I was consciously shifting away from the organisation. For example, I distanced myself from those whose values I did not agree with. Primarily, this was to protect my own personal beliefs and values, but secondly I was aware of the impact that the culture was having on some of the players at Burrington City FC. I valued their opinion, and believed that it was important to protect myself from being categorized with the same label as some of the other staff.

Many of the challenges that I faced during my time as a practitioner-researcher within Burrington City FC occurred as a function of the culture that I was embedded in. These findings build upon those of Cushion (2001) who used ethnographic research methods to illuminate his experiences of occupying the role of a coach within elite youth professional football. Cushion's findings

suggested that the micro-political workings of the organisation, coupled with power dynamics posed a significant challenge to the coaches who worked at the club. This chapter builds upon Cushion's findings, and identifies that the impact of my experiences as a sports psychology practitioner on my thoughts, emotions, and identity ran parallel with those described by players during individual support sessions. At times, I felt rejected, isolated, and unmotivated. Initially, these feelings left me questioning my position within the club. However, over time I faced up to, and navigated my way through these critical moments and the existential anxiety that they induced. Despite this, it is suggested that the journey of a sports psychology practitioner upon graduation is not smooth.

An in-depth understanding of culture, and appropriate personal characteristics are essential for a neophyte practitioner's survival during their first few months and beyond of working within professional football. A stronger focus of this during professional training would be beneficial for the development and subsequent success of applied practitioners working in elite sport. In practice, this might involve the delivery of a number of compulsory workshops by the BPS or BASES during professional training. These workshops should be delivered by those who have worked in challenging sport cultures at different stages of their career, with the aim of educating, and informing trainee practitioners on how professional sport cultures might influence, shape, and inform the delivery of sport psychology practice. For example, in elite cultures where the sport psychologist is only offered a short-term contract, their role may be judged on the performance of the athletes that they work with. This might be challenging for those whose philosophy of practice is embedded within humanistic counselling methods.

In summary, chapter 3 explored my experiences as a neophyte sports psychology practitioner within one professional football club across three full footballing seasons. I have provided a

general representation of those situations that had a significant impact on my identity and professional development. As noted previously, the organisational culture within Burrington City FC was a strong feature in each of the vignettes, and served to shape my journey as a practitioner. The findings from this chapter suggest that it is critical for sports psychology practitioners to possess an in-depth cultural understanding of their workplace, and a high level of self-awareness. Chapter 4 builds upon these findings, and explores the lived experiences of youth players who were contracted to Burrington City FC academy across the research duration. The aim of this is to develop a more holistic understanding of the influence of the professional football culture on youth player identity, and explore whether there is a synergy between my own experiences, and the experiences of players within the professional football club.

CHAPTER 4. THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYERS: CHALLENGES TO IDENTITY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Published research within the field of TID and sports psychology has highlighted a number of important factors that may facilitate the development of young athletes, inclusive of the talent development environment (Henrikson, *et al.* 2010; Martindale, Collins, & Daubrey, 2005; Martindale & Mortimer, 2011; Pankhurst, 2015; Richardson & Reilly, 2001; Weiss *et al.*, 2008). More specifically, Martindale and Mortimer (2011) identified the importance of the coaching environment in supporting athletes to develop the necessary tactical, technical, physical, and psychological skills for optimal performance over a longitudinal time frame. Historically, there have been a number of different talent development frameworks and models operationalized within professional football in the UK, the most recent of which is the EPPP. The EPPP was implemented at the start of the 2011/12 season by the Premier League with the aim of successfully transitioning young players to senior professionals (Premier League, 2011).

With relation to the talent development environment, Cushion and Jones (2006), and other researchers (Parker, 1995, 1998, 2001; Roderick, 2006) have commented on the unique culture of professional football, and its potential to influence the experiences of players who operate within this social context. In this thesis, culture is defined as the beliefs, norms, values, written, and unwritten rules that influence the interactions and working environment of an organisation (Jones, 2010; Nesti, 2010). As noted in the literature review, professional football has been described as a distinctively working class occupational domain (Parker, 1996) based on notions of aggression, masculinity, and toughness (Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Richardson *et al.*, 2004; Roderick, 2006; Willis, 2009). These environmental characteristics might not be conducive to the healthy

psychological development and identity formation of youth players as they transition within a professional football club (Mitchell, 2015). Therefore, it is important to consider how the social context of professional football affects the lived experiences of young players. Gearing (1999) applied Goffman's (1959) work on total institutions to the professional football culture. He made this connection due to the closed, formal, and strict structure that is often imposed on players. More specifically, he described football clubs as total institutions that encourage players to develop certain skills and characteristics as they transition through adolescence and into adulthood (p.48). For example, a winning mentality (Parker, 1996), strong display of macho behaviors (Richardson *et al.*, 2004), and conformation to cultural norms (Roderick, 2006). Given the above, Richardson, Gilbourne, and Littlewood (2004) suggested that those players who exist within this culture may be driven to hide their true feelings and be inauthentic in their behaviors. The frequent positive and negative experiences of young players within, and across seasons poses a number of psychological challenges for individuals to overcome, especially with relation to their identity development (Richardson *et al.*, 2004; Nesti *et al.*, 2012).

Sports psychology researchers have explored some of the psychological challenges that young players may face as they progress within a football academy (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Mills *et al.*, 2012; Reeves *et al.*, 2009). Reeves *et al.* (2009) identified a range of stressors experienced by early adolescents (e.g. making errors, opposition stressors, team performance stressors, family stressors), and middle adolescents (e.g. coaches, contractual stressors, playing at a higher level). However, this research can be critiqued as it only focused on those stressors experienced by players during matches. Nesti (2010) furthered this, and identified a broad range of psychological challenges such as; injury, deselection, motivation, finance, anxiety, roles and responsibilities, and relationship with the manager. In contrast to this thesis, Nesti's findings were based on his

reflections of working with senior professional footballers in the Premiership, and therefore may not be representative of the challenges faced by youth players. Although researchers (Compas *et al.*, 2001; Nesti *et al.* 2012; Reeves *et al.*, 2009; Richardson & Gilbourne, 2004) have identified some of the psychological challenges that youth footballers may face, we are yet to attain a full understanding of their impact on youth player identity and behavior. It is suggested in the literature, that a narrow identity/sense of self may be detrimental to players when they are faced with career transitions and critical moments (Mitchell, 2015; Nesti, 2004; Nesti & Littlewood, 2010). More specifically, a narrow identity might prevent personal growth, autonomy, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1962), therefore individuals might fail to navigate their way through challenging situations that arise as a result of their chosen profession (e.g. injury, de-selection). Despite these suggestions, the long-term impact of culture on elite youth footballer's identity, and consequently their ability to cope with challenging situations has not been studied. It is important to explore the conditioning effect of long-term exposure to professional football environments using appropriate methodology (Gearing, 1999), which will be discussed later in the introduction.

To date, identity research within sports psychology has been dominated by athletic identity. Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder (1993) defined athletic identity as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role, and looks to others for acknowledgement of that role” (p.237). A number of studies have explored individuals level of athletic identity in sport at different career development stages. Within professional football, Mitchell *et al.* (2014) explored the level of athletic identity of elite youth footballers during their two-year apprenticeship. He used Erikson's (1968) identity theory to frame the experiences that were discussed by players during their interviews. Their findings highlighted the important role of culture in shaping and influencing player identity. Traditional cultural characteristics such as power, dominance, and authority were

considered detrimental to the development of a clear sense of identity. However, his data was collected using retrospective semi-structured interviews, and he acknowledged the importance of future studies that make use of in-depth longitudinal research methods to deepen our current understanding. In addition to this, Mitchell (2015) noted the importance of psycho-sociological approaches to understanding player's identity development as a function of the culture they exist within, as it might provide sports psychologists with a clear understanding of how best to support youth players.

As discussed in the literature review, Social Identity Theory (SIT) is an identity framework that explains group processes in organisations (Hogg, 2001), and refers to an individual's knowledge that they belong to a group with a valuable and emotional significance to them (Tajfel, 1982, p.292). More specifically, SIT proposes that individuals will adopt the characteristics of a group they aspire to be a part of, and maximize the differences between themselves and other outside groups (Hogg, 2006; Hogg & Terry, 2001). For example, professional footballers may assume stereotypical characteristics of individuals within a professional football club such as masculinity in order to fit in with their teammates. However, research is yet to examine whether this is facilitative or debilitative to a young players' identity and psychological development. It is important to examine how the social context of professional football influences player identity development, and placing culture, as opposed to the individual, at the center of the work adds a new viewpoint to the literature.

The current chapter builds upon research findings from studies that have both explored stressors and identity in professional football. This study further developed data collection methods used in previous research, and employed in-depth, insider, observational research methods over a longitudinal time frame (Littlewood, 2005; Parker, 1996). I had the opportunity to observe a range

of situations that players were exposed to both on the pitch/training ground, and within the broader academy complex. In addition to this, I observed player's behavioral changes, and supplemented observational data with informal discussions with players, staff, and parents. It is argued that the breadth and depth of data collection methods used, allowed for a more comprehensive insight into the daily psychological challenges that academy footballers experienced, and the consequent impact on their identity and/or behavior. It is important to address this gap both for the future delivery of sports psychology support within professional football, and future research. The following chapter will facilitate the development of appropriate and effective sports psychology support mechanisms within professional football. Secondly, this chapter will enhance sports psychology practitioner's awareness of the unique socio-cultural challenges that players must successfully navigate if they are to 'make it' as a professional footballer.

The aim of the current chapter is to present and discuss a range of critical moments that were frequently experienced by players across the foundation, youth development, and professional development phases. These moments are identified as having a visible impact on an individual's identity, development, and/or consequent behavior, determined through my own observations, and discussions with each of the players during individual support sessions.

4.2 CONSTRUCTING THE NARRATIVES

A naturalistic approach to data collection (Kahan, 1999) was used in order to meet the objectives of the chapter. More specifically, a range of data collection methods (e.g., participant observation, informal field interviews, field notes) were employed to allow for a holistic, in-depth, and complete understanding of the events and situations that academy players and staff experienced (Denzin, 1989). I observed the participant's behavior and interactions both on the footballing field, and in

the broader surroundings of Burrington City FC's training and match day complex (Cushion, 2001). In addition to this, I further approached and probed participants when it was appropriate, for example a discussion with a player in my office following the observation of an event on the training ground. I sought a meaningful, and deeply insightful account from those who were at the center of the experience using their own language (DeMarco, et al., 1996).

My field notes were used as a base platform during the data analysis. In a similar manner to that described in the previous chapter, I identified and documented events from the field notes on a timeline. This timeline represented the different months of the year across the 3 seasons that I was employed as a practitioner-researcher at Burrington City FC. Following in depth, and critical discussion with my supervisory team (Patton, 1999), a series of events were chosen. These events provided a strong and general representation of the lived experiences of young professional football players, with a particular focus on the challenges to their identity. Following the identification of appropriate events, I examined the literature for links, supporting, and contrasting material. Therefore, an inductive thematic analysis occurred where literature was sought as a result of the findings that emerged.

4.2.1 Writing Style

In keeping with the style of the thesis, the data is presented in the form of a creative narrative (Brown & McMillan, 1991). The aim of this approach was to enable a dramatic retelling of events that captured the unique experiences of the participants (Tierney, 2002). By presenting the data in the form of a narrative, it is hoped that the reader will be engaged, and can transport themselves into the situations that are divulged (Mitchell & Charmaz, 1996). Beatty (2010) supported this, and suggested “not only do emotions, in a quite obvious way, belong to narratives: they build on, allude to, and echo other emotions and events; they refer to interwoven lives” (p.2). Through the

use of narrative, it is suggested that the most intense emotions can be immediately grasped by unfamiliar others (Carrithers, 1992). Following each of the vignettes, I analyse the event using appropriate theoretical and research material that aims to deepen our understanding of the lived experiences of young professional football players within a professional football club. A final section synthesizes each of the narratives, and explores the implications of the findings in relation to future research, and applied sports psychology practice.

4.2.2 Ethics

As discussed previously, all participants were made overtly aware of the purpose of the research study, and were provided with the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point. Further to this, pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of those individuals within the organisation. In some cases, potential identifying factors, for example roles and responsibilities have been altered to ensure participant confidentiality (Macphail, 2004).

4.3 FINDINGS

What follows are 6 separate, but interrelated narratives that aim to illuminate the daily experiences of academy footballers within one professional football club over a 3-year time period of practitioner-researcher engagement. These narratives are connected in that they all relate to three key concepts; career transition, relationships with key stakeholders, and the organisational culture of the professional football club. Each of the narratives posed a psychological challenge to one or more individuals, and the consequent impact of this on the individual's identity, and behavior within the organisation is explored.

4.3.1 Transitioning to the 1st team: A yo-yo of emotions

Burrington City FC is renowned for giving young players a chance at senior level. Normally, these players transition from the U23 age group, however on occasion some players bypass the U23s and move straight from the U18s to the 1st team. The following vignette explores the experiences of a second year scholar (Nathan) during his transition from the academy to the 1st team environment. Nathan was the stand out player for the U18 age group, and as a result of the 1st teams recent results, and performances, the 1st team manager (Ryan) was looking to make a number of changes to his squad.

November 2015

The 1st team got thrashed again at the weekend, this was as somber Monday morning as I've experienced so far. The gym, usually a vibrant, energetic, and buzzing place was silent. The only noise came from the grounds man mowing the pitches outside. As the U18 age group crouched outside of the gym putting on their boots, Ryan, and his assistant (Paul) shouted across to the U18 sports scientist, "You can tell Nathan he's with us today (pause), in fact we will have him for the rest of the week". Nathan, along with the other U18 players lifted his head, the sport scientist spoke, "you better get a move on, don't want to be late for your first session". Nathan quickly tied his laces, jogged across to the astro turf pitches, and joined up with the rest of the 1st team squad. Following the training session, the coaches mentioned that Nathan had impressed, consequently he was granted with a place in the squad for Saturday's game. After around 65 minutes, Burrington City FC were 2-0 down, and the crowd were booing both the players and management. Ryan whistled Nathan from the touchline, he was coming on. He then patted his back, and told him "change the game son". This was Nathan's first game in front of a crowd this size, and by his own admission he didn't feel as though he did himself justice. The coaches at the game spoke about

him looking “like a rabbit in the headlights”, they further suggested that he wasn’t his usual confident or creative self. Although Nathan didn’t perform as well as he had hoped, he was on a high, he had made his debut for the 1st team at the age of 17, and he had received good backing from the fans via social media. For the next couple of games, he travelled as part of the 1st team squad, and was brought on for the last 15 minutes of each game. His performances were improving, and he was continuing to impress in training. As a result of this, Nathan was granted with his first ever senior start. It didn’t go to plan. Nathan was substituted at half time, after making a mistake which led to the opposition scoring. He was replaced by an experienced professional, nearly twice his age.

On the Monday morning, Nathan reported for training along with the rest of the 1st team squad. Ryan had called off training, instead they were going to watch the DVD from the weekends game and then do running with the sports scientist as a punishment. Nathan left the DVD room head down, and walked through the canteen without saying a word. Following the running session, he picked up his bag and went home. This wasn’t like Nathan, normally he would sit with the U18 players at lunch time, and wait for them to finish before leaving. Two days later Nathan approached me, he mentioned what had happened in the DVD room, how embarrassed he was by the criticism he received, and how humiliated he felt. Nathan continued, he trained worse than ever before today, his confidence was shattered, he was terrified of making a mistake.

Nathan didn’t start the next game, or the game after, and the week after that he was dropped from the squad completely. Nathan hadn’t played a game of football in nearly a month, and was struggling to understand whether this was a punishment for his mistake, or if it was because he wasn’t needed anymore. In an individual support session with Nathan he commented, “everyone thinks it all this cause your now with the 1st team, the coaches say it’s such an amazing experience

and how good it is for your career. But the truth is, I'm not playing any games. I get that I made the mistake, but they didn't even give me time to make up for it, they brought me off at half time and I've not had a chance since. If they don't think I'm good enough they should just tell me, I'd accept that. But I'm in no man's land right now". Nathan felt rejected. He went on to explain that his transition to the 1st team environment was not only hindering his footballing development; it was ruining his relationship with the other players in his own age group... "The lads don't sit with me anymore, they always give me the 'Ohh your too big time for us now', or 'shouldn't you sit with the pros'. I never asked for any of this, and they don't seem to get that. The 1st team don't socialize with me, they think I'm a kid, and now the U18s aren't the same with me because they don't think I'm a part of their squad anymore. I'm not wanted by any age group, I wish I could just go back to the U18s and be normal like the rest of them". It was clear that Nathan was affected by the comments of the others in his age group, he believed that there was a deeper meaning to the remarks as opposed to them being 'banter'.

Nathan's experiences continued in this manner, and over the next couple of months he was in and out of the 1st team squad. Although he was still training with the 1st team he had been playing some games back with the U18 age group. I sat with Nathan each week to discuss his experiences, his negativity was overwhelming. Nathan could no longer see any positives in the situation he found himself in. He was experiencing a number of psychological stressors, such as; low self-belief, isolation, dip in form, and career transition. Eventually, Ryan and Paul had decided that Nathan would be better off transitioning back to the U18s full time. His reputation was tarnished amongst the staff, and he now carried the label "that lad hasn't got what it takes".

Analysis

Initially, Nathan experienced pride, joy, and excitement when he was asked to train with the 1st team. Yet, over a longer period of time his experiences were not as he had hoped. In reality, Nathan encountered a range of deep and negative emotions that resulted in him questioning his position at Burrington City FC. The transition from youth to senior level has been highlighted within sports psychology as one which may pose a number of psychological challenges for the athlete to overcome (Morris, 2013; Pummel, 2008; Reeves *et al.* 2009). In addition to this, TD researchers such as Bloom (1985), and Gullich (2011) have noted that top performances at junior level, may not necessarily be accompanied by the same level of success at senior level. Given the cultural characteristics of professional football e.g., displays of masculinity and toughness, reluctance to demonstrate emotion, and banter between individuals, it is suggested that the challenges individuals face during the transition from youth to senior level within this particular social context may be exaggerated (Nesti *et al.*, 2012). In their model of career transitions within professional football, Reeves *et al.*, (2010) highlighted the need for support mechanisms to be put in place for those players who fall between a youth scholarship and the 1st team squad. They suggested that young players are often not prepared for this stage of their career, where they may be the least valued members of their particular social group. Although Nathan had not yet completed his scholarship, his experiences of moving up to the 1st team environment were signified by a lack of social support, and losing his sense of self-worth. For example, he had received negative feedback from the manager, and was no longer involved in match day squads. This supported Reeves *et al.*'s, (2010) identification of the difficult period that post academy players may face. Nathan spoke about being rejected by the 1st team, and no longer being accepted by the U18 age group, which meant that Nathan did not have a social network that he could identify with. It is suggested that

Nathan's experiences may be analysed using an existential psychology perspective (Nesti *et al.*, 2012). The critical moments that Nathan was faced with, such as being dropped from the 1st team squad, and being rejected by his teammates induced anxiety (May, 1975). Nesti *et al.* (2012) indicated that moments such as these can be deeply uncomfortable. However, if an individual demonstrates the courage (Corlett, 1996) to move forward, despite not knowing what the outcome will be, this may eventually result in personal growth. Nesti and Littlewood, (2011) noted that searching for a meaning of the situation by reassessing their deep rooted values and beliefs may facilitate the successful navigation through a critical moment.

Further to the challenges that the transition posed for Nathan socially, he was also struggling to cope with the psychological effects of his experiences. Nathan no longer felt confident in his ability, and spoke about wanting to just be 'normal' like the other players in his age group. In addition to this, he emphasized that the lack of social support he experienced left him feeling rejected. It is suggested that Nathan's experiences are not coherent with traditional definitions of career transition. Early work by Schlossberg (1981) suggested that career transitions are smooth, pre-planned events. However, Nesti and Littlewood's (2011) term 'critical moments' may have a better fit in this situation because of the manner in which Nathan's experiences occurred. His movement to the 1st team was unpredicted, involuntary, and as a consequence of the environment that he found himself within. The 1st team manager had identified Nathan as a potential solution to the 1st team's results and performance at the time. However, when Nathan made an important mistake in his first start for the club, Ryan immediately went back on his decision, Nathan was cast aside. My observations were similar to Roderick's (2006) findings, he suggested that those players who are of little value to a manager are often frozen out and rejected from the organisation. Ryan further demonstrated his power and authority over Nathan by aggressively, and

unforgivingly highlighting his error using a number of expletives, and questioning Nathan's ability to play at that level in front of the other squad members during the Monday morning DVD session. In addition to this, Ryan excluded him from the match day squad. Cushion and Jones (2006) observed the management and communication style displayed by a youth team coach to his players during a competitive game. They suggested that the managers were aggressive, abusive, and did not give players the opportunity to explain their actions. It is argued that this may be heightened at 1st team level due to the increasing importance of results, and huge pressure placed on managers to succeed (Herskedal, 2016). The impact of this on Nathan psychologically appeared to be significant. He spoke about feeling isolated, no longer viewing himself with any self-worth, and longing for others to understand. In addition to this, being recognised as a stand out player no longer meant anything to him, his only desire was for things to be the way they used to be. It has been suggested by Nesti and Littlewood (2011) that if a player is to successfully navigate their way through the volatile, and ruthless football culture, they must possess a clear sense of self, and be flexible to respond to the situations that they are exposed to.

4.3.2 Here today, Gone tomorrow: The experience of being sent on loan

Since the replacement of reserve teams with the U23 age group in football academies, it has become increasingly common for clubs to loan out players either before, or once they attain a professional contract (Magrath, 2016). The aim of this is to expose young individuals to senior football, and explore whether they are ready for the transition from academy football to the so called 'men's' game (Mourinho, 2015). Burrington City FC, sent a number of U18 players on loan to local clubs for the final few months of each season. However, of the five scholars who were loaned out during the 2015-16 season, none were successful in attaining a professional contract at the club. Therefore, at Burrington City FC, being sent on loan was interpreted a sign that you were

going to be released. For example, I recall a conversation between myself and a strength and conditioning coach regarding the delivery of support sessions to one of the players out on loan, his response to my question was “I wouldn’t worry, if he’s on loan he won’t be here long anyway”. The following story describes a second year scholar’s (Connor) loan experience, and the consequent impact of this on his identity. Connor signed for the club when he was 10 years old, and based on my own observations, and discussions with other stakeholders at Burrington City FC he was a confident, well liked and professional individual who had good relationships with both the players and coaches. Connor was playing well, he had started every U18 game so far during the season, he was involved in the U23 squad every week, and had featured for the 1st team in County cup games.

February 2017

*Connor was called into the U18 manager’s office before the scholars were dismissed. Tony (U18 manager) and Harry (U18 assistant manager) informed him that he was going on a 3-month loan to Shackleton Town FC until the end of the football season. Connor was further informed that his loan would begin the next day. However, as the club was non-league, he would still be based at Burrington City FC on the days that he did not train with Shackleton Town. In the first instance, Connor didn’t respond well, he didn’t understand why he had been sent out on loan, and why he had been given less than a day’s notice. In an individual support session, Connor commented “I play for the 23s nearly every week, that’s where I’ll be next season if I get a pro. So shouldn’t I be judged on how well I play for them, not some sh*t non-league outfit”. I asked him to go away and think further about the situation that he found himself in, and how he could turn it into a positive. A couple of days later he returned to the club, with a more optimistic outlook on what lay ahead... “I spoke to my dad about it last night, he said it’s a good opportunity, they already know I’ve got*

the talent, it's just proving myself physically. The U18s games are too easy for me now, and I don't always start for the U23s so I'll take it as it comes, and show em what I've got". In his first game, Connor did exactly that, and was rewarded with man of the match. On the Monday morning he reported to Burrington City FC. He walked tall, his shoulders broad, Connor was full of energy, and enthusiastic to talk about his first game. In an individual support session, he spoke about how welcoming the players were, and the positive praise he received from the manager. He had enjoyed the game, and spoke as though Shackleton Town FC now meant something to him. Before he left he asked if I knew why he wasn't involved in the U23 squad for their game that afternoon, but before I had chance to answer he spoke again "It's probably because they want me to rest up after Saturday, maybe they thought the physical side of the game would take it out of me". Connor then left the room and high fived one of the other scholars in the gym.

The next weekend he also received man of the match, however he picked up a slight injury near the end of the game. When speaking to Connor about this the following week he wasn't concerned about his injury, and mentioned that he would be back fit for the next game. Connor spoke about Shackleton Town FC with passion and pride, he was no longer just in this for his own development, he was in it for the team. For the second week, Connor wasn't involved with the U23 squad, this time he attributed it to his injury, and again didn't seem overly concerned. Saturday arrived, and although Connor was match fit he did not start for Shackleton Town FC, he was used as a substitute for the last 10 minutes. Connor was frustrated, he had completed one full training session at Burrington City FC, and one at Shackleton Town FC. In addition to this, he had gone out of his way to call Shackleton's manager and let him know that he had come through the training session without any problems and was available to start the game. The U23 squad were playing

away against bottom of the table, and for the third week running Connor wasn't involved in the squad. However, things were about to get worse.

Over the next 3 weeks Connor didn't start a single game of football, and had not been a part of any of the U23 squads since his loan spell began. Concerned about what the staff at Burrington City's thoughts were, Connor approached Shackleton Town FC's manager to better understand why he had lost his starting position. He was informed that the club's other right back, an old experienced professional had threatened to leave if his game time didn't improve. The Shackleton Town FC manager explained to Connor that unless the guy had a 'howler' he would not be granted a start. Connor was angry, he decided to approach Tony and explain the situation he found himself in, Tony's response only served to increase the anger further "That's men's football for you, it's a good learning experience, you've got to wait for your chance, and then take it". Connor didn't agree with this, although he didn't dare say that to the manager. He believed that the writing was on the wall, his time at Burrington City FC was coming to an end, and without game time he couldn't influence their decision. He continued "the other lads laugh at me; they think it's a joke that I'm not starting. It isn't though is it, it's my career, and I've only got 3 weeks left. If I get released I will be fuming, no one has even been to watch me, the U23s manager ignores me. This isn't teaching me a lesson, or helping me learn the game. I come here training and give 100%, I go and train with Shackleton town FC and do the same, but when it gets to the weekend no one cares. I doubt they would even be bothered if I didn't turn up". In my consequent meetings with Connor we spoke very little about Burrington City FC and his loan experience. He mentioned a potential move to Scotland, or America to continue pursuing his dream of becoming a professional footballer. His focus was no longer on Burrington City FC, and by his own admission he was becoming more isolated from both his teammates and the rest of the organisation. His body

language had changed, he was slumped, he looked worn out, and carried himself as though he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. A week later an injury to one of the 1st team players opened the door for him to start the last two U23 games of the season. Although lacking in motivation, Connor noted that this was a nice way to finish, and looking back on his experiences over the last 8 years he didn't want his time at the club to end on a sour note.

Decision day arrived, the boys gathered in the changing rooms waiting to be called to their fate. This was one of the biggest days of their lives, the last 10 years had all built up to this. Today was the day they would either achieve their dream and become a professional footballer, or the day their world would come crashing down. The atmosphere in all areas of the club was different. The players were quiet, nobody joked, it was tense. The staff spoke about this being the worst day of the season, seeing the lads you've worked with for a number of years leave the club in tears, their hopes and dreams crushed was not easy. Connor was second to be told the news, and he was one of three players in his age group to be offered a professional contract. He now had a decision to make. Did he re-identify with the club, and spend the next 12 months fighting for an extension to his contract despite the organisational challenges that he had faced since being sent on loan, or did he leave, and explore his options elsewhere.

Since being offered a professional contract Connor has signed a 12-month deal with Burrington City FC and returned to pre-season training with the U23 squad in June 2017.

Analysis

Connor was exposed to a range of different challenges during the 3 months that he was sent out on loan. These included; the transition from Burrington City FC to Shackleton Town FC, de-selection, approaching the end of his contract, the changing nature of his relationship with peers

and coaches at Burrington City FC; and being offered a professional contract. In individual support sessions with Connor he discussed the impact of these on his identity, attitude, and behaviors. Prior to being sent out on loan Connor spoke with passion about his dedication to Burrington City FC. His strong identification with Burrington City FC was further supported by his initial reaction to his loan spell, he was reluctant to move away from the organisation. However, as a result of his loan experience this started to change. Connor began to emphasize the importance of other avenues (e.g. university, other clubs), he spoke about his time at Burrington City FC in the past tense, as though he believed it was over. It is suggested that during this period of time Connor transitioned from a committed Burrington City FC player to an individual who turned up to the club because it was written in his contract. Research by Reeves *et al.* (2009), and applied practice accounts by Nesti (2010) identified contracts, de-selection, and relationships with coaches as three of the most commonly reported stressors by players within professional football. According to existential psychology, the experience of stressors and the need to make decisions will provoke anxiety. Facing up to this anxiety might impact the identity of an individual, and consequently allow for growth and development (Maddi, 1986; Corlett, 1996). However, during the period of existential anxiety before personal growth occurs, an individual may have to deal with a range of negative emotions, and a questioning of the self (Nesti, 2004). Connor was experiencing each of the challenges highlighted by Reeves *et al.* (2009), and Nesti (2010) simultaneously, and therefore it is suggested that the situation may be more psychologically challenging than experiencing any of the stressors in isolation.

Connor had been at the club for 8 years when he was sent out on loan, in his own words he was Burrington City FC through and through. For example, at first he was reluctant to transition away from the football club, and demonstrated a strong and exclusive social identification with the

organisation (Tajfel, 1982). Given the time that Connor had spent as a part of Burrington City FC, it is suggested that the club had a long standing and deep meaning to his self-concept (Kelman, 1958). Athletic identity literature has suggested that those individuals who are one dimensional (Werthner & Orlick, 1986) may find career transitions more difficult to overcome (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Marcia, 1996). However, Connor had been assigned to Shackleton Town FC, and in an attempt to cope with this transition, he started to look for ways in which he could identify with the club. Social identity theory supports this, and highlights that by searching for meaning within a particular social group, individuals may define the group more favorably (Tajfel, 1982). Connor spoke about how much he enjoyed his first game with Shackleton Town FC, particularly because of the positivity of the manager towards him, and the welcoming nature of the players. This is in stark contrast to his experiences with Burrington City FC where he felt betrayed and rejected. Furthermore, his perceived value within the organisation was a positive factor in helping him to identify with this social group. An example of this is receiving man of the match for his first two games. This played a part in broadening his identity, Connor had been exposed to other another organisation, and was experiencing how a professional football club at a lower level operated. In accordance with the identity capital model (Côté, 2016), he was attaining valuable tangible and intangible resources that would help him to navigate his way through future situations with appropriate support.

Although current transition literature has explored athletic retirement from sport (Haerle, 1975; Mihovilovic, 1968), and the transition from youth to senior level (Pummel *et al.*, 2008), it has failed to explore loan spells as a within career transition. It is suggested that the application of current transition models (e.g., Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) is not appropriate. There are a number of reasons for this, firstly they are too rigid and structured, suggesting that events occur within a

set period of an athlete's life. Further to this, they do not consider the short term movement from one club to another. Reeves *et al's* (2010) suggestion of the need for a critical post academy phase that takes into account the challenges that players face once they have attained a professional contract (aged 18), but are not yet ready for 1st team football (aged 23), has closer relevance to Connor's experiences. However, his loan spell occurred whilst he was still a part of the U18 age group, and therefore further research is needed to understand how this transition may be better incorporated within current models.

Connor's positive experiences at Shackleton Town FC didn't last for long. Not only had he experienced de-selection from Burrington City FC, he was now faced with being de-selected from the starting line up at Shackleton Town FC. Taking into account Shackleton Town FC's managers explanation as to why he wasn't starting, it became obvious that Connor was lacking control over his future on a short term and long term basis. Findings from researchers within professional football (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006) are in line with Connors experiences. In that sense, Parker (1996) suggested that football managers hold all power over their players, and often use the short term nature of contracts to scare players into listening to any instructions that are given. Nesti (2004) suggested that experiences such as this may lead to existential anxiety. Connor expressed a desire to influence whether he attained a professional contract, but without game time he was not being given the opportunity to do so. As a result of his experiences, Connor searched for meaning away from Burrington City FC and Shackleton Town FC. In individual support sessions, he explored other options, and was attempting to prepare for having his contract terminated. By engaging in this, it may be suggested that Connor was attempting to regain control of his fate.

During his loan experience, Connor was left searching for social support. He described feeling isolated, lonely, and as though he was no longer valued by those who were important to him within

Burrington City FC. Over the previous 8 years Connor had developed what he would call ‘close’ relationships with the other individuals in his age group. However, he was now the butt of their jokes. Parker (1996), and Platts (2012) have used the term ‘banter’ to refer to humor that is directed at another individual within an organisation. In line with Collinson (1988), the brutal jokes, and direct comments that Connor received had a deeper meaning (they signified to him that he was being rejected from the organisation), and he found this very difficult to deal with. During a period when he needed the support and guidance of his peers most, he believed that they had failed him. However, Gearing (1999) would suggest that this is not uncommon within professional football, and as a culture, players are encouraged to mask over their true feelings and put on a brave face (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006). Parker (1996) suggested that players socialize with those who hold positions of power and influence within the club, and therefore it is suggested that the players also believed that Connor was no longer a valuable member of Burrington City FC. Further to this, Connor believed that he had been “hung out to dry” by the coaches. No longer seeing him as valuable to their own agenda, Tony, and Harry had washed their hands of him and believed he was somebody else’s problem. Richardson and Reilly (2001) suggested that without the appropriate environmental support mechanisms that it may be incredibly difficult for talented athletes to reach their potential. Connor’s resources had been removed, and it was as though the organisation had given up on him.

Finally, being offered a contract demonstrated how quickly fate can change in professional football. Nesti *et al.* (2012) supported this, and noted that players often experience a number of positive and negative emotions during a season. Connor had experienced the extremes of emotion over a period of only 3 months. The challenges that he faced were both personal, and interpersonal, and had impacted his personal and professional development (Richardson *et al.*, 2004). As a result

of this, Connor no longer identified with the organisation. He had broadened his identity, and in accordance with the identity capital model, he was now employing alternative resources that saw him seek meaning and value away from Burrington City FC. However, he made the decision to renew his contract with Burrington City FC, one which will inevitably further challenge his identity over the next 12 months.

4.3.3 Power and influence: “You may as well go and sit in the stands mate”

At Burrington City FC it is common practice for first, and second year scholars to be involved in the U23 squad during the football season. Primarily, this is for the coaches to attain an understanding of those players who they believe will be capable of playing for the 1st team in the future. Generally, the U23 fixtures are scheduled for a Monday, this provides fringe first team players, and talented U18 players with the opportunity to attain extra game time. At Burrington City FC the players who were involved in the U23 squad would be informed by text following the 1st team match on a Saturday. The following story describes an event which occurred between a second year scholar (Josh), and the U23 manager (Aiden) prior to kick off.

March 2016

Monday morning arrived, and those players who were not involved in the U23 squad reported for training. However, all of the second years were absent. They had each received a text from Aiden, and were in the squad for the U23 game. Josh, and the rest of the second year scholars were asked to report to the match stadium at 11.30am for a 1.00pm kick off. It is club policy that staff, and U18 players watch all U23 home games. Therefore, half an hour before kickoff, I set off from the training ground to head to the stadium with Alex, the youth team sports scientist. The players were out on the pitch warming up, but as I entered the stands to take a seat I saw Josh sat there, head

in his hands. "Josh, what you doing up there?" I asked. From looking at his body language I assumed he was ill. Josh quickly moved his hands, sat upright and responded "Come up here a min and I'll explain". As I got closer to him I noticed that his face was a burning red, he spoke quietly to prevent anyone else from hearing. "I can't believe what Aiden's just done, this place calls itself a football club, pfft" Josh was one of the quieter members of the group, but he spoke with anger and passion. He explained that he arrived at the ground as usual, and the squad had watched a pre-match video in the club lounge before entering the changing rooms. It was here that his ordeal began. As the players changed into their shorts and socks it became apparent that there was one player too many. The U23 captain (Baldy) counted the players, there were 19. Match day squads should be made up of no more than 18, and therefore one player was going to miss out. As Aiden entered the changing room some of the more confident, older boys led by Baldy informed Aiden of his mistake. Josh noted that the players were laughing and made a rumbling noise as Aiden looked at each of the boys. In front of everyone, Aiden's eyes fixated on Josh "Josh, you may as well go and sit in the stands mate! There's no point you being in here if you're not in the squad anymore". Josh was left to pack away his boots, to the sound of laughter and cheering from the other players. He stated that he had been sat in the stands ever since. As I was talking to Josh the U18 manager, Jim turned up. He shouted over to Josh, "OI, I thought you were in the squad", Josh replied "No, Aiden got the numbers wrong". Jim didn't comment, he just turned his head and continued his conversation. Josh moved to sit with the rest of the U18 players. He never received an apology from Aiden, and the event was not mentioned again. The next month, Josh was released from Burrington City FC.

Analysis

Although Aiden was forced into removing one of the players from the squad, it was the manner in which he conducted this that had a significant impact on Josh. Individuals signed to a professional football academy have been described as having to navigate their way through a ‘school of tough knocks’ (Roderick, 2006). Informing Josh in front of the rest of the players, and as bluntly as he did was a demonstration of the power hierarchy that exists within this culture (Roderick, 2006). Kelly and Waddington (2006) supported this, and suggested that managers hold the top spot. Josh had no option but to swallow his pride and listen to Aiden’s instructions. It is further noted that situations such as the above are part of the ‘hidden curriculum’ that occurs within clubs to prepare players for a career as a professional, and identify those who possess a good attitude (Cushion & Jones, 2014). It has been suggested by coaches in Roderick’s (2006) study that at times players need to sacrifice themselves for the good of the team. Those individuals who are willing to do this are often the ones who have the most successful careers (Roderick, 2006). However, given the point in the season when this took place, it may be suggested that Josh’s focus would be on him attaining a professional contract as opposed to putting the team first.

The behavior of the other players further served to heighten the negativity of the experience. It was the older, more experienced players who raised the issue to Aiden, made a mockery of the situation, and in turn Josh. In line with the suggestions of Kelly and Waddington (2006), Baldy and the other individuals were highlighting their position within the organisation, and used the situation as a psychological test for Josh to see whether he would ‘lose his head’. Further to this, such behaviors have been highlighted as the traditional way within professional football for the older players to assess whether younger players would be able to cope with the relentless and brutal 1st team environment (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006). Professional football clubs are described by Gearing

(1999) as total institutions, and therefore the other players in the age group may have behaved in the way they did as a result of their own experiences and socialization (Goffman, 1959). However, the implications of this are concerning, in that they may prevent the healthy psychological transition from adolescence to adulthood (Gearing, 1999). For example, individuals might not be able to cope with or manage the demands of life outside of the football culture such as developing social relationships (Mitchell, 2015).

Josh was left questioning his self-worth and role within the organisation. He attempted to find an explanation for the situation. However, Josh suggested that the reluctance of key stakeholders to engage made him feel worthless. Secondly, all of the other individuals in his age group were involved with the squad, and therefore Josh asked “what is the point in me being here if I’m the one who gets left out”. Those who Josh identified with (manager and players) had demonstrated a lack of care towards his thoughts and feelings. In addition to this, his own age group manager had refrained from offering any form of support and guidance. In contrast, he completely ignored Josh’s experience. This was a critical moment for Josh, and invoked emotions of anger, and rejection demonstrated when I spoke to him in the stands. As noted in the previous analysis, de-selection is one of the most commonly reported stressors within professional football (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Nesti & Littlewood, 2011; Nesti *et al.*, 2012; Reeves *et al.*, 2009), and therefore Josh needed to appraise the situation and figure out how he would cope going forward. Josh’s experience occurred only a small period of time before his contract was terminated, and therefore it could be suggested that his experience on this day served as an indicator for what his future held with Burrington City FC.

4.3.4 Operating within the professional football culture: ‘A BTech cleaning course’

The transition of players from the U16 age group to youth team scholars signified players entrance to Burrington City FC on a full time basis. These individuals combined a dual role (training to become a professional footballer, and studying an education course in collaboration with the local college). As part of their role within the professional football club, players were required to complete a range of ‘jobs’ each day. Examples of this include; pumping up all club footballs (pre-academy through to 1st team), arranging cones, bibs, and further equipment, cleaning the gym and canteen. Players were not dismissed from the club until all jobs had been completed, and checked by one of the coaches. However, since Tony was introduced as the new U18 manager, a number of youth scholars mentioned that the cleaning regime had taken on a new and increased level of importance. Players were allocated new tasks, and the unsuccessful completion of these within a time limit would result in punishment. The following narratives aim to illuminate this.

As I left the gym and headed towards the canteen for my lunch, I noticed that a number of scholars were strategically positioned at each window from the gym entrance to the far side of the training complex by the car park. They had been given one bucket between them, and a small cloth each. Their task was to clean every window on the complex both outside and in. I asked the first player I walked past whether they were still completing the gym session scheduled for that afternoon. One of the players positioned further down shouted “No, apparently this is more important, because we haven’t won in 6 we need to be more professional. This is how he’s told us we will learn that”, a few of the scholars shook their head and muttered under their breath. The next player spoke up “Fran, if we’re not getting good results on a Saturday what is the common sense thing to do” I refrained from commenting, so he continued “Shouldn’t we be out on the pitch practicing and preparing, it’s obvious that what we’re doing at the moment isn’t working”. A scholar placed a

few windows down joked “I signed my contract thinking I was training to be a professional footballer, not complete a BTech in cleaning”. The rest of the boys laughed, and returned to work. I didn’t disagree with what they were saying, but I couldn’t tell them this. I knew that if it got back to Tony I would have to face the repercussions, “just stick at it lads, the quicker you get it done the sooner you can go home”. On this particular day they left the training ground at 5pm, training finished at 12.30pm.

The second vignette occurred as a result of four youth team scholars playing ping pong in the classroom during their down time. There was no rule stating that the scholars could not do this, and often staff or 1st team players would challenge the scholars to a game if they were not busy.

The classroom door burst open, Tony entered. His glared at the players and aggressively asked “What do you think you’re doing in here?”. Before they had chance to reply he spoke again “Have you done your jobs?”, one of the U18s conservatively responded “Yeah, we did them before the workshop with Fran. We didn’t start til later cause the 1st team were watching a DVD for Saturday”. The U18 manager paused before turning and exiting the room. The players perched on the tables in the classroom, and asked me if they should continue playing. I mentioned that I didn’t think it was a good idea as Tony didn’t seem impressed. As I finished speaking he barged back through the door, this time holding 3 dustpans, 3 small brushes, and 1 large brush. He dropped them on floor and said to the players “you may as well spend your time productively! Go and sweep the carpark, if it’s not sparkling ready for when the kids arrive you’ll be back in on Sunday”. A Sunday was usually the player’s day off, they rolled their eyes and followed Tony out of the classroom.

Analysis

The above story illuminates the requirements of players within Burrington City FC beyond football related duties. A number of researchers have discussed the role that chores and punishments possess within football cultures (Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Mitchell, 2015; Jones, 2012; Parker, 1996; Platts, 2012; Roderick, 2006). Jones (2012) suggested that institutional chore systems were a method for managers to assert their dominance over players, and socialize them into conforming to the values, and beliefs of the club. More specifically, the club emphasized their belief that youth players needed to behave like model professionals if they were to be successful, whilst also demonstrating that they were 'resilient' in the face of challenge.

Tony, the U18 manager introduced a stricter disciplinary system when he was appointed by Burrington City FC. This required the players to go beyond their normal duties, and failure to comply resulted in either financial punishment (e.g. £5 for turning up late to training), or being asked to report to the training ground for a physical session on their day off. On a number of occasions, I witnessed these being handed out by Tony, and further information on such events was disclosed in individual support sessions with players. These findings built on those of Parker (1996). More specifically, Parker suggested that apprentices who rebelled against their low grade jobs were granted with punishments such as being dropped from the weekend squad or being fined. In the above narrative, players were tasked with cleaning the windows as a punishment for the team's recent results. Therefore, it may be suggested that the manager asked the players to do this in order to protect his own status within the organisation. Having only recently joined Burrington City FC, he might have believed that he was under pressure to prove himself, and the poor results of the team were not working in his favor. Punishing the players was a visible method to divert responsibility from himself and towards the players, however this resulted in a poor relationship

between the manager and the players. Other members of staff within the organisation noticed this, and although some went along with Tony's policies, others disagreed. For example, I recall an argument between Tony and his predecessor who now held a higher position within Burrington City FC. He believed that the players needed a greater level of freedom around the training ground if they were to display creativity on the pitch. Research has identified a poor coach-athlete relationship as one of the main challenges that athletes face during their careers (Fraser-Thomas & Cote, 2009). As suggested by Roderick (2006), the only method for players to overcome this was by showing willingness to participate. In his ethnographic research study, he indicated that those players who were most willing to participate in these activities would be awarded with the backing of the staff, and granted roles such as captain and vice-captain.

The findings from this study demonstrate that despite the considerable changes that have taken place within football academies as a result of the EPPP, the 'hidden curriculum' remains within Burrington City FC. The EPPP was introduced as a holistic talent development model, that aimed to create optimal talent development environments. More specifically, the requirements were created in order to promote excellence, nurture and support talent, and successfully transition young talent to successful senior players (Premier League, 2011). However, at Burrington City FC it had done little to address some of the psychological challenges that players face by existing as a part of this culture. This may be attributed to a number of potential reasons, including; the narrow focus of the EPPP guidelines on mental skills training, the background of coaches employed at Burrington City FC, and the challenges that I faced in attaining adequate time at the club to deliver the psychological development program. A more critical debate regarding the implications of this is presented in the final chapter.

4.3.5 What the gaffer says goes: “Be professional!!! You’re not kids anymore”

The following narrative highlights an event that occurred between a small group of U16 players and the academy coaches. It is a representative example of the management and communication style that was employed by staff to players of all age groups within the professional football club. At Burrington City FC, players in the YDP and FP were released from school two days per week, on these days they reported to the club and completed daytime training sessions coupled with an education session in the classroom...

I was sat at one of the tables in the canteen eating lunch. The canteen was busier than usual, around ten coaches lined the comfy chairs, their gaze fixated on the wide screen television. Bet slips were spread across the tables in front of them, it was the day of Cheltenham races. To ensure that they could watch the event, the coaches had freed up their afternoon by offloading both the youth team scholars, and the younger academy boys to the education officer.

One of the bigger races started, the coaches roared and shouted for their pick. Three of the U16 players (Toby, Callum, and Chris) entered the canteen, using it as a shortcut to get to the classroom. Toby tripped up Callum, Callum swore at him, and the three of them laughed. One of the coaches caught a glimpse of what had happened, he glared across the room and aggressively shouted “OI lads, what do you think you’re playing at. BE PROFFESIONAL!!! You’re not kids anymore”. He then turned back to face the TV, rubbed his hands together and mocked the other coaches “I’ve got this in the bag, I’m miles ahead of you lot. Mickey yours looks like Russel stumbling home after a boozy night”. Toby turned to Callum and Chris, and shook his head. Another coach spoke up “Boys, I’m telling you now if you don’t hurry up and get in that classroom you will be getting a strike”. The accumulation of three strikes resulted in players having to report to the training ground on a Sunday and watch the younger age groups play. The players put their

heads down and dragged their feet until they reached the classroom door. The coaches remained focused on the TV in front of them. I was sat trying to understand how any of this made sense. The player's behavior was immature, yet it was insignificant in comparison to some of the other on goings within the organisation. Further to this, the coaches had berated the players over being professional as they sat gambling on horse racing. I wasn't sure that this was exactly the behavior of professional role models.

Analysis

The above narrative is closely linked to two of the three conceptual focuses within the current chapter, especially with relation to the autocratic management styles employed by the academy coaches, and the challenges of existing within the professional football culture. It is suggested that despite the significant changes to professional football as a sport over the last 30 years (e.g., finances, media, globalization), professional football cultures have remained embedded in their working class roots (Cleland & Cashmore, 2016; Nesti, 2010, 2014; Parker, 1996; Richardson & Gilbourne, 2004). The notions of masculinity and toughness that run through the daily working practices demonstrate this (Platts, 2012; Willis, 2009). Mitchell (2015) supported these suggestions, and made the link between professional football clubs and other total institutions, such as the army, or prisons. Here, those with authority control and influence the actions of powerless organisational members using threats and punishments (Goffman, 1959). The data collected in this narrative, and a number of the previous narratives, suggested that the experiences of players within professional football clubs are comparable to this. In addition to the stressors noted by previous researchers (e.g., Reeves *et al.* 2009), it is suggested that succeeding within this unique culture alone may pose a number of psychological challenges for players to overcome. In this instance, Toby, Callum, and Chris were given no option but to act in accordance with the

suggestions of their coaches and the dominant values and attitudes that prevailed in the club (need for disciplined individuals, clear understanding of position within the club's hierarchy). They were not able to question whether it was unprofessional of the coaches to gamble in front of minors, nor were they given the opportunity to raise their own point of view. They either conformed, or faced the punishment. The result of this was players being inauthentic in their actions, in order to give themselves the best chance of becoming a professional footballer. A further example of this would be the U18 players completing their daily chores without raising their concerns to the manager in the hope of being perceived as a player with a good attitude. This may influence a player's self-concept, and therefore may prevent them developing a healthy professional identity (Mitchell, 2015). More specifically, research by Littlewood and Nesti (2011), and Mitchell (2015) suggests that a healthy professional identity refers to an individual with a clear sense of self. Erikson (1968) supported this and suggested that in order for an individual to develop a strong, and healthy identity, there is the need for an exploration of a range of avenues, and the eventual commitment to those that hold meaning and value. However, the 'protective and encompassing' (Mitchell, 2015) nature of professional football clubs may prevent the exploration phase from taking place. Researchers (Nesti, 2004; Nesti & Littlewood, 2010) have suggested that this may inhibit a player's ability to cope when they are faced with the range of critical moments experienced in professional football.

The importance of the coach's status within professional football may serve to enhance these socio-cultural challenges. Researchers in talent development (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Richardson & Reilly, 2001) have identified the importance of key stakeholders in developing talented young athletes. More specifically, as young athletes progress within sporting environments, the role of the coach becomes increasingly important (Wylleman & Lavellee, 2004).

Coaches are influential figures that can shape the behavior and actions of athletes and the performance environment/culture. Therefore, research suggests that coaches should make decisions based on athlete needs, and integrate coaching into a more holistic talent development program that focuses on the person (Abraham *et al.* 2006; Abraham & Collins, 2012; Vickers, 2011). However, Ternent & Livesy (2004) found that football managers believed it was essential to impose structure, order, and rules if they wanted to be successful in their position. Research is at odds with the behavior of coaches within this particular professional football club, and the influence of this appeared to be detrimental to player's psychological development and footballing experience.

4.3.6 A two-year journey: The nightmare that never ended

The following story tells the tale of one individual (Marco) over a two-year period. Marco signed for Burrington City FC at the age of 16 after he was released from one of the world's most prestigious football academies (based in the UK). The narrative is presented under a number of subtitles across time, each of these represents challenges that Marco had to overcome.

Setting the scene

Four weeks into his time at Burrington City FC Marco ruptured his ACL during a training session. His injury occurred at the end of April, only three weeks prior to the start of his GCSE's. Marco was referred to a top knee specialist in the UK, and based on his recommendations he was booked in for an operation the next week. Marco's operation did not go smoothly, he had a reaction to the post-op medication, and therefore he ended up spending nearly a week in hospital. Following his release, Marco reported to Burrington City two evenings per week, the same as the other lads in his age group. Day release was no longer an available option, as all players were encouraged to

attend school in preparation for their GCSE's. Marco wore a full leg brace, and was on crutches to support his recovery. As a result of this he was told by his school to "revise at home". Marco's results were poor. He only passed one GCSE (P.E), so in addition to his rehabilitation; he would have to spend the next 12 months attempting to pass his Math's and English GCSE level qualification.

The impact of the injury

It was now a number of weeks since Marco's injury, and he was still finding his feet at Burrington City FC. Given the nature of the injury, I had spent a lot of time speaking to, and getting to know him as a person. Marco was a little reserved, and seemed overwhelmed by the situation he found himself in. Not only was he required to cope with being released from one professional football club, he had picked up a serious injury in his first couple of months with his new club. The injury came at a time where he was trying to establish himself as an accepted member of the U16 age group, in preparation for their transition to youth team scholars at the end of the season. Ever since rupturing his ACL Marco had been completely isolated from the other players. He would turn left and head for the gym when his mum dropped him at the training ground, whereas the other players would turn right and head for the changing room. He remained in the treatment room until his rehab session was finished, where he would then leave the training ground. Marco felt alone, he described himself as "different to the other players" because he was new to the club and wasn't going to be playing for a while. He was concerned that the coaches wouldn't get the opportunity to form a bond with him, and he didn't want to be seen as the player who is always injured. He suggested that he could not face watching football, it didn't matter whether it was an academy training session, or his favorite team on the TV, it was "too painful". Marco felt a mixture of emotions, and both spoke about, and displayed these during my individual support sessions with

him. He felt angry, frustrated, upset, and at the same time empty, but most commonly he reported a deep fear. He was scared of re-injury, scared that this would be his career over, and scared about what lay ahead.

It wasn't only football that was affected by the injury. He could no longer go out with his friends in the evenings or on weekends, he couldn't walk unaided, and he mentioned "I'm so tired when I'm not here that all I do is sleep. Even if everyone is playing FIFA or something, I just can't stay awake, so I go offline and get in bed".

10 months of rehab

10 months later and Marco was slowly being integrated back into training. The process had been incredibly challenging for him both on and off the footballing field. He had been attending college more frequently than most of the players, and had been allocated a personal tutor in an attempt to pass his Math's and English qualifications. However, he had failed both attempts to date. Although Marco had more opportunity to engage with the other scholars as they were now in the club on a full time basis there was no denying that he was the outsider. He couldn't take part in the same activities as the 'fit' players, he hadn't trained for 10 months, and given the strong focus of the culture on performance he was often excluded by key stakeholders. For a while Marco was encouraged to attend the U18 home and away matches. However, a time came when the U18 manager started to introduce members of the U16 squad. This meant there were no longer enough seats on the coach for Marco. Once Christmas passed, the U18 manager also decided that Marco would "be better off doing something worthwhile in the gym" than watching the home games. During individual support sessions Marco had divulged how difficult this had been, yet he also expressed an unwavering focus, determination, and desire to return to fitness and continue his quest to become a professional footballer. Marco would comment "I don't care how hard it is in

here, I'll get through it. I just keep imagining that feeling when I play my first game". The sports science and medicine team at Burrington City FC had formed a close alliance with Marco, and had worked tirelessly to support him in every possible way. We were our own unit, and had developed a strong identity. For example, Marco found the endurance sessions on the pitches very difficult, therefore each day a different member of the sports science team would complete the session with him. 10 months into his rehab Marco completed his physical testing, and his results were good. The specialist had signed him off, his 6-week integration back into training started.

Re-rupture of the ACL

We were three quarters of the way through the 6 week return to training protocol. It was a usual morning, and Marco put his boots on with the rest of the scholars ready for the training session. Once the players went outside for training the gym freed up, at this time there were only a small number of injured players across the U18, U23 and 1st team squad. Therefore, the gym was quiet, there was an absence from where Marco used to be. Around half an hour later, I was sat in my office delivering an individual support session to one of the injured scholars. My office looked out into the gym, as did the physios treatment room. Danny (a first year scholar) burst into the gym, shouting and screaming. It was obvious that he was in a panic, but I couldn't understand what he was saying, his words were muddled. I opened my office door as did two of the physios (James, Kieran, and Alan). Danny desperately screamed "QUICK, WE NEED A PHYSIO. IT'S BAD" ... James asked "what's going on?", Danny replied "Its Marco, his knee. He's not moving". Panic filled the air and you could cut the tension with a knife, the physiotherapists grabbed the relevant equipment and charged outside, the strength and conditioning coach followed, wheeling the medical trolley. I was on my own with the other injured players. One of them spoke "Is it Marco

Fran? Is he ok? ". I avoided the question, I wasn't sure myself what was going on. I told the players to go and get a drink and either sit in the canteen or sit in my office until the physios returned.

What felt like a lifetime later, the gym doors reopened, and James shouted "Fran, open the treatment room for us, and move all the crap off the floor". I quickly threw things on the chairs clearing the way for Marco. I went back into my office, not wanting to get in the way. A few of the players who had been sat in my office emerged as the event unraveled. Alan, the other physio shouted "GET OUT NOW! THE LOT OF YOU GET OUT OF THE GYM". Alan had never spoken like this before; I knew from the tone of his voice that it was serious. The sports scientist (Charlie) came into the office, and we shut the door. We looked at each other in silence. He was a ghostly white, and I was nearly in tears. Charlie sat down, put his head in his hands and said "I feel like I'm going to be sick". I was desperate to just speak to Marco, I believed that seeing him would somehow make me feel better. Both myself, and Charlie sat waiting, it felt like we were in a hospital relatives room awaiting bad news. Through the office window we saw the three physiotherapists walking towards us. They entered our office, and Alan broke the news. He suggested that following a thorough assessment he was 99% sure that it was a full rupture of the ACL, with potential damage to his cartilage, and meniscus. My mind went blank, and my head dropped, Charlie didn't comment either. The conversation then turned to informing his parents, and getting him back to the specialist ASAP. Alan looked to me and said "Fran, I think its best if you go and sit with him, if he wants to speak to anyone it'll be you". I had developed a very strong relationship with Marco, but in this instance I didn't know what to say. I gently entered the room, Marco didn't lift his head. He was sat up on one of the treatment beds, his socks, shin pads and boots thrown across the floor. I walked across to him and placed my arm on his shoulder. He burst into tears, "I can't do it again, I can't go through this again Fran, I felt strong, what happened", he paused before

continuing “this is me done isn’t it, I’m never going to play again now, I worked so hard, it’s not fair”. He lay back on the bed and looked up at the ceiling, tears streaming down his face. I replied “we will get through this no matter what, us guys in this gym are a team and you are a part of that. Every single one of us is here for you”. He nodded, and continued to cry. I didn’t know what else to say. Marco was absent, he was empty.

Following the consultation with the specialist and results from the scans it was confirmed, Marco had re-ruptured his ACL, torn his meniscus, and attained damage to his cartilage.

Broken relationships

Marco’s second stint of rehabilitation was even more challenging than the first. On a positive note, he passed his Math’s and English qualifications, however he had now been at Burrington City FC for nearly two years, and was yet to play a competitive match.

I sat down with Marco to discuss his progress, and options outside of sport. It quickly became apparent that he wasn’t his normal self. Despite the significant ups and downs Marco had always been polite, but today he was abrupt. When I asked him what was going on, he commented “I’m fuming, have you heard what the coaches have done”. I didn’t know what Marco was on about so asked him to explain further “they spoke to Jon and Mikey (two other players with long term injuries) yesterday on their own. Mikey said they asked him how his rehab was, and started to talk about career that he might be interested in. Jon said they said the same to him, and that they’re going to help them out with finding something else or another club. I’ve seen the gaffa twice today, and a few times yesterday and he hasn’t mentioned anything to me”. Jon and Mikey had both been at the club for a significantly longer period of time than Marco, and this was the only explanation I had for their behaviors. I replied “I haven’t spoken to Jon or Mikey since yesterday, and the

*coaches haven't mentioned anything so I'm not sure what's going on". Marco went on to say "they make out to the parents they're decent people and they care about the players, but they don't. They only care about the people they think are going to play for the 1st team. In the two years I've been here only 2 coaches have said more than 'alright' to me, and the gaffa (U18 manager) isn't one of them. Truth is they don't give a sh*t about me, but if I was fit they would. They treat me as though I never signed. Like why do the injured players have to stand on the opposite side of the pitch with the parents on a match day. They say 'your part of the team so you have to do your jobs like everyone else' but when it comes to other things they couldn't make us feel less included if they tried. I'm telling you now, if I ever play again it will be nothing to do with them lot, and I'll make sure they know it". Although Marco had spoken about situations such as the above before, he always remained calm and level headed. His relationship with the coaching staff at Burrington City FC had been poor since his injury began.*

Arrival of the inevitable

A couple of weeks later came the annual release/retain day for the scholars. Having spoken to Marco a lot about this over the last few months he was aware that the chances were that he would not be offered anything. He was still around 4 months of fitness, and therefore would not have played a single game during his two-year scholarship. Marco came out of his meeting with the U18 manager and his assistant in less than 5 minutes, he walked into the gym in tears. He looked across at me and shook his head. I told Marco that if he felt like it he could come in and talk, and if not I would catch up with him later in the week. Once the rest of the players had been told he came into the office. Marco sat down "I don't even know why I'm crying, I knew I wouldn't get anything, but they didn't have to be so blunt about it. They just looked at me and said "because you haven't had chance to play we can't offer you anything, but you can stay and do your rehab

until your fit if you want to. You will have to find your own way in, but were happy for you to stay if you can". I don't think they care about what I've been through. I wish one of them could be in my shoes just for one day, and see how they feel. They didn't even say I'd done well for sticking at it. I didn't expect anything, I'm not thick, but a pat on the back for still coming in would have been fair. When they say you can stay and do your rehab if you want, where else do they think I'm going to go. I've got no money, no job, no car, barely any qualifications, and I can't even run. I get paid until the end of next month so I've got 6 weeks to get myself a part time job so I can afford to come in and do my rehab. I don't think they appreciate it, it's not easy. I don't want to be injured, I had a chance of making it, and now I'm struggling for the chance to ever play again. When they signed me they told me I'd achieve big things, I'd be in the first team, and all that. Well look at me now".

Analysis

Marco's story is identified as a unique case within Burrington City FC. However, it is suggested that across the 92 professional football clubs that exist in England and Wales, other individuals will have been through similar experiences. Marco faced a number of extremely challenging situations that had both a short, and long term impact on his psychological development and identity. The first challenge that Marco needed to overcome was being released from his previous club. However, by signing for Burrington City FC only a few weeks later Marco suggested that this had helped to offset some of the negative emotions. In contrast to career retirement, Marco had been offered a new opportunity to pursue his athletic ambitions as a footballer (Lavalley & Wylleman, 2000; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994). The opportunity to embark on a new journey, and establish an identity as one of the players for Burrington City FC was taken away from Marco when he attained his injury.

During the period of time when Marco first ruptured his ACL, he was undergoing a number of other transitions. In accordance with Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) career transition model, Marco faced transitions on three of the four levels (athletic, psychosocial, and academic). More specifically, at an athletic level he was changing team, and preparing for the transition from the U16 to the U18 age group. Secondly, his peers, and coaches had not only changed, but in accordance with the model were also beginning to take a more important role in his development. Finally, Marco was in his last few weeks of school, a place that he had studied for the previous 5 years. Having signed a youth scholarship with Burrington City FC he was preparing for the transition out of full time education. However, Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) model can also be critiqued in the sense that, it is not flexible, and therefore does not factor in the non-normative paths that some individuals' journey may take. Richardson, Reeves, and Littlewood (2012) presented a model of within career transitions that furthered Wylleman and Lavalle (2004) by taking into account the cultural and environmental level of the organisation that the individual is playing at. Career transitions have been highlighted by sports psychology researchers (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Nesti & Littlewood, 2011; Nesti *et al.*, 2012) as posing a number of potential challenges for an individual to overcome. Therefore, Marco was having to deal with instability and change in a number of aspects of his life. This may have accounted for the deep fear that he spoke about during the initial individual support sessions. Marco was unable to do even the simple things in life, for example walk up a set of stairs. The situation he found himself in was distant and unfamiliar with that only a few weeks previously.

During the time that Marco was signed for Burrington City FC, he never played a game for the club, yet he experienced a range of deeply personal and significant challenges. Research in professional football to date has failed to illuminate cases such as the above. In contrast, it has

focused on game specific stressors that players face (e.g., Compas *et al.*, 2001; Reeves *et al.* 2009). Although there is research on the psychological challenges of injury (Bianco, Malo & Orlick, 1999; Forsdyke *et al.*, 2016; Forsdyke & Gledhill, 2014), much of this literature explores rehabilitation in isolation from the culture in which the athlete exists. For example, Kaplan (2012) identified individuals with ACL deficient knee's as copers or non copers. However, the participants were not elite athletes, and their journey back to fitness examined the physiological aspects of recovery as opposed to the psychological challenges that each individual faced. In Marco's case, his injury was part of a much broader experience. More closely related to this study, Smith and Sparkes (2005) used a longitudinal narrative to explore individuals experiences of injury and the impact on their broader life. However, their study was not comparable to this research as each of the men in their study suffered spinal cord injury, and were left disabled through playing sport. Marco was still embedded within the professional football culture, and his injury although career threatening, did not leave him disabled. Despite this, Marco was isolated from the rest of the players, and denied the opportunity to identify with this particular social group because of his injury (Tajfel, 1982).

In an attempt to protect himself from this situation, Marco developed a very close bond with the sports science and medicine team that worked with him on a daily basis. It is suggested that he identified himself as a part of this group by highlighting the similarities between himself and the members of staff (e.g. based in the gymnasium, and a keen interest in fitness), and by emphasizing the differences between himself and the rest of the players in his age group (Tajfel, 1982). As he started to reach full fitness, Marco then transitioned away from the sports science and medicine team and towards integrating more with the players at the club. However, the re-rupture of his

ACL posed a further threat to his identity, and left him isolated. Marco questioned whether he was capable of completing the rehabilitation process for a second time.

The lack of support during the process from the coaches, and isolation from the rest of the players in his age group left him feeling alone and worthless. This was particularly the case when the coaches did not conduct a progress meeting with him, although they had with the other injured players. Marco mentioned that the coaches had barely acknowledged him, and did not care about where he ended up. Researchers such as Nesti, Parker, and Roderick support the experiences of Marco and suggest that professional football clubs are often harsh and unforgiving settings, particularly for those who are sidelined through de-selection or injury.

Marco's experiences during his time at Burrington City FC highlight the importance of further research to explore the psychological challenges that young footballers face during their experiences of long term injury, and how sports psychologists can best support these individuals.

4.4 SUMMARY

Each of the narratives presented within the current chapter were related to the organisational culture within Burrington City FC, and had a significant impact on the actions and identity of the player/s at the center of the narratives. Although previous research has explored youth player identity (e.g., McDougall *et al.*, 2017; Mitchell *et al.*, 2014; Nesti & Littlewood, 2011), each of these studies used semi-structured interviews, and relied on retrospective recall for the data collection. This chapter adds a longitudinal perspective, where I (the researcher) was positioned within the professional football club, and therefore understood the participants, prior to, during, and following the challenges that they faced. Further to this, a range of data collection methods

(observation, field notes, informal interviews) allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the psychological challenges faced by youth players.

The findings from this study resonate with those of Parker (1995), and Roderick (2006) who have studied the lived experiences of players within the professional football industry, despite the significant global growth of the game, this study indicates that the attitudes, norms, and traditions of this particular social world have remained the same. In that sense, it is suggested that the challenges young footballers face occur as a function of the organisational culture within professional football clubs. It is suggested that there are aspects of the football culture that are debilitating to the long-term psychological development of players who are both successful and unsuccessful. For example, the dominance of power, control, and authority have a significant role in shaping the experiences and development of youth players. These conditions may result in players who have a narrow sense of self, based on the need to conform as opposed to be creative and explore the self for personal growth.

Previous talent development models such as Wylleman and Lavalée (2004) do not allow for an adequate explanation of the challenges that young players face within this talent development environment. Firstly, these models are too rigid, and do not take into account the many non-normative transitions that youth players may face. Secondly, they do not consider the encounters of the individual in relation to their surroundings. Nesti (2010) emphasized the importance of this, and suggested that an individual's experiences cannot be separated from the context in which they exist. However, Henrikson *et al's* (2010) ATDE model has closer relation to the findings of this study, as they considered the influence of macro and micro levels of the talent development environment on the athlete at the center of it. Greater consideration from all stakeholders within professional football clubs of how these levels may influence talent development would be

beneficial for players going forwards. More specifically, this would include the influence of specific aspects of the professional football environment at a club and national level within youth and senior football. In addition to this, more frequent communication amongst stakeholders from different departments might facilitate the creation of optimal talent development environments that challenge but support players.

It is suggested that as a youth development framework, the EPPP has overlooked some of the important psychological challenges that young footballers face. The EPPP has focused on the delivery of mental skills training to help promote player development of the 5C competencies (control, confidence, commitment, communication, concentration). In order for sports psychologists to effectively support individuals through these complex situations, a deeper level of support is required that addresses personal trials and tribulations. Mental skills training might help performers to build their self-confidence or specific psychological characteristics that are directly associated with performance. However, in some cases it is suggested that these approaches might plaster over the cause of the issue (Nesti, 2010), and in situations where the psychological challenges are more holistic that MST is not an appropriate intervention. In line with the suggestions of Nesti (2004, 2010, 2012) the use of counselling approaches to support players on an individual basis might be a better delivery method. More specifically, counselling methods explore the perceptions and subjective meaning that individuals attach to events and situations (Giorgi, 1970), and place an emphasis on an individual's holistic development, and psychological well-being. In counselling approaches, the client-practitioner relationship is of great importance, and Corey (2009) suggested that this in turn will dictate the quality of the therapeutic outcome.

In summary, chapter 4 used ethnographic research principles to explore the lived experiences of youth players within one professional football club across three full seasons. This chapter made

use of the same representation style as that of chapter 3, and vignettes were chosen that provided a strong representation of player's general experiences. Findings from this chapter suggest that the organisational culture within Burrington City FC was detrimental to the identity development of those players who existed within it. Furthermore, there was a parallel between the psychological challenges that youth players were facing, and my experiences as a sport psychology practitioner. For example, cultural features such as dominance, control, and authoritarian communication styles are highlighted in both chapter 3 and chapter 4 as shaping the experiences of those at the center of the study. Building upon this, chapter 5 draws together the data that has been presented in each of the empirical chapters thus far, and evaluates the efficacy of the psychological support program that was delivered to players and support staff across the duration of the research project. In line with this, the following chapter seeks to attain the perspectives of players, staff, and parents on the efficacy of the support program that was delivered.

CHAPTER 5. AN EVALUATION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM DELIVERED WITHIN BURREINGTON CITY FC

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter builds upon the findings from chapter 3, and chapter 4 of the thesis, and evaluates the efficacy of the psychological development program that was delivered within Burrington City FC across the duration of the PhD. The evaluation of sports psychology services has received considerable attention in published sports psychology literature (Anderson *et al.*, 2002; Chandler, 2014; Partington & Orlick, 1987). Anderson *et al.* (2002) highlighted the importance of consultancy evaluation in; improving practitioner effectiveness, facilitating the learning process, and developing an evidence base to support the value of the discipline. Several researchers (e.g., Anderson *et al.*, 2004; Gould *et al.*, 1991; Partington & Orlick, 1987; Weigand *et al.*, 1999) have attained coach, and athlete perceptions on the effectiveness of sports psychology practice, and identified desirable qualities of sports psychology consultants. For example, Partington and Orlick (1987) highlighted the need for the consultant to appear interested and caring if they are to be effective in their role. However, none of the aforementioned studies explored the efficacy and impact of sports psychology services delivered in professional football (Nesti, 2004).

Sports psychology researchers (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Nesti, 2004, 2010, 2012; Reeves *et al.*, 2009) have highlighted the need for effective psychological support mechanisms to be put in place, with the aim of helping young footballers to cope with the range of challenges that they will inevitably face. Harwood (2008) supported this, and based on a longitudinal project with youth football coaches, suggested that there is an extensive scope, need, and untapped potential for sports psychology services in professional football. However, we are yet to develop an understanding of what constitutes effective sports psychology practice within this particular social context. Since

the suggestions of Harwood (2008), the Premier League have introduced a new youth development framework, titled the EPPP. The introduction of the EPPP adds fresh importance to the need for sports psychology practitioners to be aware of how they may best operate in elite youth football.

As noted in the literature review, the EPPP is a long term development strategy that aims to provide English academies with the world's leading support and development system (The Premier League, 2012). The introduction of the EPPP signified the formal requirement of psychological support within football academies (FA Game plan, 2010). Given the acknowledgement of sports psychology by the EPPP, opportunities for sports psychology practitioners to operate within youth set-ups has significantly increased during the last five years. For example, a number of Premier League clubs now employ one or more full time sports psychologist to operate at each phase of youth development (FP, YDP, PDP). Further to this, it is suggested that the level of support will continue to increase at both club and national level (Nesti, 2010). This was signified in June 2017 when a sports psychologist was employed by the FA to travel with the England U23 squad to the European Championships. This was the first time that a sports psychologist has travelled with a youth squad for any competitive tournament (Daily Mail, 2017). When we consider the increasing integration of sports psychologists within professional football, it is imperative that we have a clear understanding of what effective sports psychology practice consists of within this particular social context. Although the EPPP does offer some guidance on the contents of sports psychology delivery (e.g. imagery, self-talk), they can be considered basic when compared to guidelines offered on other disciplines (e.g. EPPP Sports science requirements). Furthermore, since the introduction of the EPPP there have been no published accounts from applied practitioners exploring what effective practice looks like within the new youth development framework.

This chapter builds upon previous research in other sports (e.g., Anderson *et al.*, 2004; Brewer & Shillinglaw, 1992; Gentner *et al.*, 2004; Gould *et al.*, 1989; Gould *et al.*, 1991; Partington & Orlick, 1987), and explores the efficacy of a sports psychology program that was delivered across a longitudinal time frame. Research of this kind is important in removing some of the barriers that sports psychologists currently face in professional football (Heaney, 2006; Kremer & Marchant, 2002; Nesti, 2010; 2012; Pain & Harwood, 2004), understanding how the sports psychologist can satisfy both the requirements of the EPPP and the organisation, and facilitating the successful development of youth players. The aim of this chapter is to critically evaluate the efficacy of a psychological support and development program that was designed and delivered within one professional football club across the three year PhD duration. A range of stakeholders (players, staff, parents) perspectives were attained using multiple data collection methods. The following section explores the research methodology, and presents the rationale behind the design of the program. Specific details regarding the delivery and contents of the psychological development program are discussed, and evaluation methods are outlined. Finally, I present and analyse the research findings, and outline the potential implications of the results.

5.2 METHOD

The following section of the PhD was embedded within an ethnographic framework where I occupied the role of a practitioner-researcher, and made use of action research principles. Action research has been defined by the Institute for the Study of Inquiry in Education (2000) as a disciplined process of inquiry that is conducted by and for the individuals who are taking the action.

It is highlighted within the literature (Carr & Kemmis, 2003; Taylor, 2001; Price, 2001) that the primary rationale for conducting action research is to assist the researcher in improving their

actions. Altrichter *et al.* (1993) supported this, and suggested that action research allows practitioner-researchers to develop knowledge from their experiences, and make a contribution to the shared knowledge of the profession. With relation to applied sports psychology practice in professional football, there is a lack of longitudinal research from practitioners regarding the evaluation of their work (Chandler, 2014). Action research allows for a new perspective to be added to the field, only possible from the position of an insider (Bryant, 1996). In this study, three distinct phases of research are considered; the design (includes the design of the psychological development program), the delivery (the delivery of the psychological development program across the three year PhD duration), and the evaluation (use of a range of data collection methods with key stakeholders to evaluate the efficacy of the program). Each of these phases follows the phases of the action research cycle. For example, the design of the psychological development program is similar to the reconnaissance phase, the delivery phase of the research reflects the action and observation stage of the action research cycle, and the evaluation phase is similar to the reflection and review (Hart & Bond, 1995).

5.3 DESIGN OF THE PROGRAM

As noted in the introduction there were a number of factors that needed to be taken into consideration when designing the psychological development program. These included; the EPPP requirements, the culture within Burrington City FC, individual/ group player needs, my role and responsibilities, mechanical aspects (e.g. contact time, location, access), and my own consulting philosophy. The design phase took place at the start of the PhD process over a 3-month time period, and was supplemented by my observations during a 6-month postgraduate placement at Burrington City FC. There were four key aims of the psychological development program; (a) meet the requirements of the EPPP for a category 1 football academy, (b) educate key stakeholders on the

use and integration of sports psychology within elite youth football, (c) educate and support academy players during their progression within Burrington City FC, and (d) prepare players psychologically for the youth to senior transition within professional football. In line with the action research methodology (Bryant, 1996), it is important to note that the program was tailored throughout the duration of the study based on my own experiences, the experiences of players, and the evaluation procedure that took place at the end of each season.

Talent development researchers (Henrikson *et al.*, 2010; Richardson & Gilbourne, 2006; Richardson & Reilly, 2001) have suggested that developing talented youth footballers into successful senior players is a complex process. The psychological challenges that players will inevitably experience both within, and across seasons may serve to increase this complexity (Mitchell *et al.*, 2014; Nesti, 2004, 2010; Richardson & Gilbourne, 2006). These suggestions were supported by the findings in Chapter 4 of the current thesis, which highlighted career transition, relationships with key stakeholders, and organisational culture as three of the most commonly experienced psychological challenges faced by youth players as they progressed within Burrington City FC. The observation of these challenges, coupled with previous literature exploring the psychological stressors faced by academy footballers (Compas *et al.*, 2001; *et al.*, 2014; Harwood *et al.*, 2015; Reeves *et al.*, 2009; Turner *et al.*, 2014; Windsor *et al.*, 2011), and informal discussions with key stakeholders (staff, parents, supervisors), were used as a platform to design the psychological development program. The aim of this was to establish a full and holistic understanding of the needs of players and support staff within Burrington City FC.

5.3.1 Observation

The observation phase enabled me to better understand the culture that I was operating within (Krane & Baird, 2005). Visek *et al.* (2009) supported this, and suggested that cultural observations

allow practitioners to gather a more complete picture of team dynamics, coach-athlete interactions, and parent-athlete interactions than can be attained through conversations alone (Krane & Baird, 2005). Further to this, I supplemented formal and informal discussions with key stakeholders from a range of disciplines (sports science & medicine, coaching, operations, education and welfare) regarding the club's philosophy, daily practices, and written/unwritten rules. Spending a period of time embedded within the organisation before designing and implementing the psychological development program facilitated the development of relationships and rapport with key stakeholders. Ravizza (1998) supported this, and suggested that by putting in appropriate face time, sports psychology practitioners in turn create more opportunities for further interaction and teachable moments with athletes, coaches, and parents.

From my observations, it became clear that there was opportunity for a greater level of psychological engagement with those players in the PDP, as they were based at the club on a full time basis. I had identified potential pockets of time in the player's daily routines that might be used for the delivery of a group workshop or individual support session. In contrast, those players in the FP, and the YDP were only based at the club two or three evenings per week, and one full day if their school granted permission for them to attend day release. Therefore, I had noted down the evenings that each age group did not complete a gym session, and designed my program to fit into these slots. Further to this, some of the workshop topics that were delivered across the age groups were shaped by my observations of player's both at the training ground and during match days. For example, communication was identified as important as I noticed that coaches across the age groups were often encouraging the players to be more vocal on the pitch.

5.3.2 Organisational Requirements

Initially, I was employed by Burrington City FC with one role, to ensure that I met all requirements in the psychology section of the EPPP. However, during the design phase of the project I sought the opinion of a range of stakeholders within the organisation to attain a better understanding regarding how they believed that sports psychology could be successfully integrated within the academy. Further to this, I presented a workshop to full time academy staff on the psychological development program that I had designed. As a result of the presentation, and feedback from stakeholders, the content of the program was tweaked where appropriate. However, it was understood that my role within the club might be subject to change depending on staff retention and rotation, or as a function of my experiences and development as a sports psychology practitioner.

Through informal discussions with a range of stakeholders it was decided that it would be beneficial to deliver a psychological development program within Burrington City FC that included education workshops for both the coaches, and the player's parents. A number of individuals mentioned that they had not been exposed to sports psychology prior to my entrance into the organisation. Therefore, I believed that by delivering an education program to support staff, and parents, they may have an influential role in encouraging players to engage with the program. Visek *et al* (2009) supported this; he highlighted the need to inform and engage coaches and parents with the sports psychology experience of the athlete as it will make these stakeholders more receptive to the sports psychologist's work. Furthermore, discussions with the support staff at Burrington City FC helped to shape the workshops that were delivered within the psychological development program. The head of education, and welfare manager both identified the need for players to be educated on aspects of broader life particularly as they reach the U16-U23 age groups.

For example, they highlighted organisation and planning to help players with the transition from school to full time scholar. Beyond this, the welfare manager highlighted the importance of making players more aware of the loan process, as it was becoming increasingly popular for the second year scholars to be sent out on a three-month loan spell. The specific elements of the program are discussed in detail in section 5.4.

5.3.3 Consulting Philosophy

As discussed in the literature review, the role of the sports psychology practitioner has taken on many different forms in previous years (Corlett, 1996), most commonly the delivery of MST (Nesti, 2004). My philosophy of practice is embedded within a holistic humanistic consulting approach. More specifically, Friesen and Orlick (2010, p.227) described this as (a) managing the psychological effects on athlete's performance from non-sport domains, (b) developing core individuals beyond their athletic persona, and (c) recognizing the dynamic relationship between thoughts, feelings, emotions and behavior. Employing a holistic consulting philosophy was appropriate for the players that I would be working with. These individuals were aged between 12 and 23, and many were yet to attain a professional contract. Therefore, at any time their contract could be terminated. Friesen and Orlick (2010) further suggested that holistic sports psychology may best be delivered through an eclectic paradigm using central aspects of humanistic and existential psychology. In this sense, sports psychology consultants are given the flexibility to attend to the specific needs of their client, whilst still remaining true to their own beliefs and values.

5.4 DELIVERY OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The following section outlines the psychological development program that was implemented, and delivered within Burrington FC over the duration of the research project. More specifically, this

incorporates; psychological screening, individual support sessions, sports psychology workshops, and integration with key stakeholders.

5.4.1 Psychological Screening

Psychological testing was noted as an EPPP requirement for players within the FP, YDP, and PDP. All players signed to the academy were psychologically screened twice per season using the Butler and Hardy (1992) psychological screening tool. The profile measured physical, psychological, tactical, and technical aspects of performance, and each of the attributes were decided during a staff meeting, inclusive of; academy coaches, sports scientists, physiotherapist's, and myself. The aim of the performance profile was to enhance the self-awareness of the players, identify individuals who would benefit from further individual support sessions, and set short, and long-term goals. Gucciardi and Gordon (2009) supported the use of Butler and Hardy's player profile, they noted that unlike traditional psychometric assessments that impose desirable constructs on the athlete, the performance profile technique allocates the athlete with a more active role in the decision making process. Martens (1987) highlighted the importance of empowering athletes, he suggested that by providing athletes with a level of responsibility they are more likely to be committed to the task.

5.4.2 Individual support sessions

Individual support sessions were offered to all players within the three development phases (FP, YDP, PDP). There were a number of methods used to identify those players who may benefit from individual psychological support. As identified above, the psychological screening procedure was the first method used to determine those players who require a deeper level of psychological support. Secondly, a monitoring procedure was put into place at the club. More specifically, this

was a compulsory individual review session that occurred every four weeks for players in the PDP, and every six weeks for players in the YDP. The aim of these sessions was to provide players with the opportunity to raise any issues that they are facing, and review progress between each of the meetings. In addition to this, either myself, a player themselves, or a member of staff could recommend individuals who would benefit from further psychological support sessions. This was based on observations of, and discussions with the individual. Finally, an individual support program was introduced to all players with long term or career threatening injuries.

5.4.3 Sports psychology workshops

The topics of group workshops delivered to players at Burrington City FC were in part informed by the requirements of the EPPP. However, the design phase of the research project provided the basis for the identification of further topics that were considered important. Nesti (2010) supported the use of group workshops, especially with younger players. He further indicated that this may be the most favorable method of delivering mental skills, and these sessions may be whole team, or small group based.

Professional Development Phase (PDP)

As players progressed through the age groups within Burrington City FC the focus moved away from group workshops and towards the delivery of individual support sessions. It was hoped that as players progressed to the PDP within the academy they would have developed and refined their mental skills, and therefore it was my responsibility to provide a deeper level of support (e.g. confidential individual support sessions). Bond (2002) supported this, and suggested that often mental skills alone are an inadequate tool to address an athlete's personal, and even athletic concerns. In contrast, addressing the multifaceted dimensions of an athlete's identity may act as a

stepping stone to improved athletic performance. The group workshops delivered in this phase focused on the delivery of broader topics relevant to their developmental stage (e.g. lifestyle management, loan spells). Please see appendix 2 for a table documenting the workshops delivered.

Youth Development Phase (YDP)

In contrast with the PDP, the majority of psychological support was delivered to players in the YDP through the use of group workshops. During this stage, I believed that it was most important to educate the players on key psychological topics (lifestyle management, MST), supplemented with individual support sessions where appropriate. Dunphy (1963) suggested that during adolescence individuals learn best in the presence of their peers, and place a greater value on the thoughts and opinions of their peers as opposed to adult educators. It was hoped that by keeping the players together as a unit, they would be able to turn to each other for ideas, better relate to complex topics, and feel more comfortable in sharing their opinion. Within the YDP, the workshop topics were further broken down into age groups. This was necessary because a 12-year-old is at a different psychological, and athletic development stage than a 16-year-old preparing for the transition into the PDP (Erikson, 1978). Compas *et al.* (2001) supported this, and suggested that the psychological challenges faced by middle adolescents were different to early adolescents. Workshops were delivered once per week for an hour, please see appendix 3 for a workshop schedule.

5.4.4 Integration with key stakeholders

Coaches

I held a weekly meeting with coaches in the FP, YDP, and PDP on a Monday morning following the weekends game. This meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the performance of each age

group from a psychological perspective. In addition to this, it was my opportunity to speak with the coaches regarding player progression without breaching player confidentiality, and provided the coaches with the chance to raise any concerns about an individual player. Nesti (2012) supported this level of communication with coaching staff, and suggested that coaches and managers have a significant influence on the opportunities a sport psychologist is granted to be successful.

In addition to meetings with the coaches, a more formal coach education program was implemented and delivered across the duration of the study. More specifically, the coach education program is delivered both formally and informally each season. Firstly, I produced and delivered a number of education based workshops to the coaches on sports psychology as a performance discipline (please see appendix 4). In addition to the educational workshops, I worked alongside the coaches to deliver sports psychology focused coaching sessions. More specifically, this involved sitting down with coaches across the three development phases to produce a series of specific coaching session with a psychological aim. These may be directed towards a team, or individual within an age group. The focus of these sessions was on the 5C's (Harwood, 2008), and as such coaching sessions focused on, building confidence, better communication skills, controlling emotions, keeping focused, and making more effective decisions under pressure.

Parents

A number of workshops were delivered to parents in the YDP across the duration of each season. The rationale behind working with the parents of players at Burrington City FC was to maintain a close synergy between the sports psychology workshops, and parent's views. The topics of delivery are highlighted in appendix 5. Harwood & Knight (2015) supported the need for sports psychologists to work with parents. Most relevant to this program, Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009)

suggested that by educating parent's we can reduce their potentially negative effects on adolescent athletes.

5.5 EVALUATION

In line with the suggestions of Sagor (2000), the evaluation phase of the study incorporated steps (d) collecting the data, (e) analyzing the data, and (f) reporting results. Corey & Corey (2002) suggested that consultancy evaluation is beneficial for both the athlete and the practitioner. For example, following a period of evaluation the type of sports psychology support may be altered or refined to better suit the needs of the client. This in turn, provides invaluable information to the practitioner which can be utilized to support their professional development, and enhance effectiveness. When deciding how to best incorporate evaluation into a youth talent development environment, Cory and Corey (2002) noted that a practitioner must consider; (1) who should provide evaluations, (2) the level of cognitive development of the team, (3) what factors should be evaluated, (4) when evaluation should take place, and (5) how to gather the information. I took each of the above into consideration when putting into place the evaluation procedures.

In relation to point (1), I decided that evaluation of the psychological development program should be provided by players in the YDP (U13-U16), and PDP (U18-U23) at Burrington City FC, parents of players in the YDP, and academy support staff. Rationale for the choice of participants is provided later on in the section. A range of stakeholder's perspectives were attained to increase the ecological validity of the evaluations, and to understand whether there was a synergy between the thoughts and feelings of those who occupied a range of roles within Burrington City FC. Secondly, the cognitive stage of the different phases was taken into account when designing each method of evaluation, and is discussed in relation to point (5). The third consideration explored which factors should be evaluated. Corey and Corey (2002) originally used this to identify factors

of an athlete's performance that the sports psychologist should evaluate. However, in this thesis, Corey and Corey's work was used to decide how best to evaluate the effectiveness of myself (the sports psychology practitioner). Following detailed discussions with a team of supervisors, it was decided that the specifics of the evaluation would be based on the group of individuals providing the evaluation. In line with consideration (4), a level of evaluation took place just prior to the end of each season that I was embedded within Burrington City FC. The aim of this was for all players in the YDP to be given the opportunity to take part in the evaluations before the annual release/retain procedure. Secondly, the sports psychology program runs throughout the season, therefore it was deemed most appropriate that the evaluations took place at the end of the program delivery. The final consideration related to how the information should be gathered. The evaluation with players at the academy was based on their development phase. It was decided that the most appropriate method of evaluation with selected players in the PDP was an individual semi-structured interview, this took place 24 months into the 36-month data collection process. Players in the YDP were given an evaluation form, which was completed individually under my supervision. In addition to this all players in the YDP were involved in a focus group with other teammates in their age group at the end of each season. The aim of the method was to attain the collective feedback of players across the academy. The parents of the PDP were involved in focus group workshops with the other parents in their age group. Finally, a select number of staff were interviewed on an informal basis (once after 24 months of data collection), and involved in the completion of a focus group. Each of these data collection methods is discussed in more detail below. The first evaluations occurred at the end of the 2014/15 season, with other evaluations occurring after the 2015/16 season, and 2016/17 season. Feedback was used to supplement my own reflections and make the appropriate changes to the program.

5.5.1 Data Collection Methods

A range of data collection methods were used to evaluate the psychological development program that was delivered within Burrington City FC. These included, interviews, focus groups, and evaluation sheets. The following table illustrates the data evaluation approaches at different points in time, the X marks which data collection methods took place.

Table 1. Evaluation approaches across the 3 year PhD duration

Interviews and Focus Groups		May 2015	May 2016	May 2017
Interviews	<i>Players</i>		X	
	<i>Support Staff</i>		X	
Focus Groups	<i>Players</i>	X	X	X
	<i>Support Staff</i>	X	X	X
	<i>Parents</i>	X	X	X
Evaluation Sheets	<i>Players</i>	X	X	X

Interviews

The formal interview process began once I believed that I had collected a sufficient level of data using the data collection methods described in chapter two to produce an appropriate and result yielding interview guide (see appendices 6, 7, and 8). The interview guides were developed deductively (Babbie, 2015). The aim of the interviews was to supplement other data collection methods by providing individual participants with the opportunity to disclose their personal understanding of events, and evaluation of the psychological development program in their own

words. In addition to this, it was hoped that the interviews would allow for the exposure of new or contradictory data (Cushion, 2001). In depth, semi-structured interviews were deemed most appropriate for this study as they allow for a rich insight into participants' experiences, opinions, thoughts and feelings (Gray, 2013). Further to this, Côté and Salmela (1996) supported the use of in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews when working with elite performers and their support staff. This is because the open ended questions allow participants to draw upon and demonstrate their knowledge. Further to this, given that they have reached an elite level, the participant is likely to have a range of previous experiences that they could draw upon to support their responses to the questions (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). A semi-structured interview format was chosen as it has the benefit of specifying a framework of questions, but allowing probing much beyond the initial answers given. This allowed the interviewee to provide clarification and specific examples to support their answers.

I carefully selected individuals for interview based on their experiences over the previous 24-months. For example whether the interviewee had access to the information that the interviewer sought. More specifically, the inclusion criteria were; players must be contracted to Burrington City FC, players must be in the PDP of the academy, players must have been exposed to the psychological development program for at least 18 months. It was vital that the players had been exposed to the psychological development program for at least 18 months, as I believed this was an appropriate level of time for the participants to be able to provide an honest and valid critique. A total of 6 players in the PDP were interviewed. This included 2 first year scholars, 2 second year scholars, and 2 players in the U23 age group. An even split across each age group was deemed most appropriate as each age group may have experienced different challenges during their journey at Burrington City FC (Podsakoff, et al., 2012). To prevent practitioner, or researcher bias when

choosing players for interview, a simple random sample was used (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). Each player who met the inclusion criteria's name was put into an age specific bag. I then chose two names at random from the bag. In addition to this, 4 full time members of staff were interviewed. I aimed to attain the perspective of a range of stakeholders, and therefore interviews were conducted with the following; academy director, head of the PDP, head of the YDP, and head of academy sports science and medicine. Those players, and support staff who were not chosen for the interview process were given the opportunity to feedback during individual informal conversations. Please see appendix 8 for a table outlining the interview participants. The chosen participants were briefed prior to the interview on the information that would be required from them, and what would be expected from them over the course of the interview. During the interview process, I controlled for researcher bias by asking questions that were objective, and remaining aware and focused on potential sources of bias (e.g., confirmation bias, and wording bias) (White, 2014). Further to this, the interview guides were developed with the support and guidance of my supervisory team, who have expertise in qualitative research methods.

As a result of my dual role as a practitioner-researcher at Burrington City FC, I had previously worked with all of the individuals who took part in the interviews. Prior to the interview process, it was seen as a benefit to the research project as the researcher had already developed a level of trust and rapport with the individuals. I believed that this would make it easier for the participants to open up and give an honest account of their experiences. All interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes, and took place in the Education Suite during a normal training day. Initially, I began by explaining general information such as the purpose of the interview, and how the interview would contribute to my achievement of the research objectives. Secondly, I focused on background questions such as how the player/member of staff came to be involved with Burrington City FC,

and their journey through the club so far. Finally, I focused on the efficacy of the psychological development program that had been delivered within the club over the previous two years. The questions on the interview guide were supplemented with probing based on each participant's unique answers, and the aspects of these responses that could best contribute to the research. This flexibility was deemed essential, and in line with White (2014) allowed me to explore and probe topics that had previously not been considered. In order to ensure the authenticity of the participant's responses, I frequently asked them to identify specific situations that further highlighted the views they expressed (Cushion, 2001). During the interviews I aimed to probe the questions until no further information could be attained. Finally, throughout the interview process, I was careful to ensure that no leading questions were asked, and that I remained non-judgmental, especially given the major focus of the interview on the use of sports psychology with Burrington City FC.

Focus Groups

According to Fontana & Frey (2000), focus groups are a data collection technique that relies on the systematic questioning of several individuals in a formal or informal setting. The primary purpose of the focus group was to supplement the information gathered via my personal observations and reflections, and the informal and formal interviews. Johnson (1996) suggested that focus groups are useful in not only understanding what participants think, but also why they think the way that they do. I ran focus groups at the end of the 1st season (May 2015), 2nd season (May 2016), and 3rd season (May 2017) with players in the YDP, parents in the YDP, and full time staff at Burrington City FC. Focus groups were deemed the most appropriate method of data collection with players in the YDP (aged 12-16) as the group context can be more successful in encouraging younger participants to talk more openly (Gibson, 2007). Each player was involved

in 3 focus groups with 6-8 other players in their age group. The focus groups with parents followed the same format and involved 6-8 participants all of which had a child in the same age group. I chose to keep the players with other players in their age group as they are at a similar stage of their career, working with the same coaches, and have the same training and games schedule each week. The focus group with the staff involved the following stakeholders; the 4 individuals that were selected for interview, the head of FP, the full time coaches, the welfare manager, and head of education. The number of participants in each focus group followed the suggestions of Krueger (1988) who advised the optimal number of participants for a focus group should be 6-8 individuals. The focus group guides were created with my supervisory team based on the objectives of the study and the data that had been collected previously (please see appendices 9, 10, and 11). In line with the interviews, all of the focus group sessions took place in the education suite at the training ground. This was deemed the most appropriate location as it was private, but also somewhere that the participants were familiar with and felt comfortable within. The focus groups last between 45 and 60 minutes and allowed for the intensive exploration of opinions, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as encouraging the divulgement of different views and discussions of agreements and disagreements. All focus groups were audio recorded. In addition to this, I noted down each time the speaker changed and who it was to help me identify who said what when more than one individual was speaking. My aim during the focus group was to maintain control, and therefore prevent one or two participants from becoming dominating speakers. At times this involved me encouraging reluctant participants to contribute to the discussion.

Evaluation Forms

All of the players in the YDP were asked to fill out an evaluation of the psychological development program form at the end of each season (2015, 2016, 2017). The aim of this was to attain individual

feedback on the psychological development program that was delivered, identify new areas of delivery, and for players to highlight the common challenges that they faced during their progression through the academy at Burrington City FC. The evaluation form (see appendix 12) was given at the end of each season as a reflective tool and a base measure for the focus group guide. From the findings of the evaluation sheets, I made changes to the psychological development program that was being delivered.

5.5.2 Data Analysis

The data analysis was not a distinct stage of the research process, data collection and data analysis were inextricably linked. The analysis consequently resulted in new questions, and new meanings that were then further explored in the field (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Bryman & Burgess (1994) supported this and suggested that qualitative research cannot be reduced to set stages or particular techniques. Rather, and as suggested by Hammersley & Atkinson (2007), the data analysis involved a continuous cycle of collecting, analyzing and reflecting on the collected data. In turn, this allowed for the development of preliminary ideas and analytical hunches which opened up new lines of inquiry for the researcher to select and pursue.

The data collected from the interviews and focus groups was transcribed verbatim. Once transcription was completed, the interview transcripts were read and re-read numerous times (Burnard, 1991). This process helped the researcher to ensure three main things; familiarity with the interviews, continual checking of credibility, plausibility, and the trustworthiness of the interview process, and facilitation of the later phase of data analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This same process was also completed for the data collected via the focus groups. The transcripts were then color coded into higher and lower order themes. This process set in motion a cascade of thoughts, feelings, and ideas about the data that would be noted down in a series of

comment boxes. Alongside this, the researcher made use of mind maps and spider diagrams which represented the sparks of understanding (Bowles, 2014). This was the beginning of organizing the data into categories which were then compared and combined with the themes that emerged from the field notes. I had completed the initial stage of organizing and structuring the data, however it now needed to be theorized before writing up. Theory was introduced as a resource to begin to make sense of the data and add some meaning. The overall analysis provided a systematic and transparent link from data to theory. The theoretical statements became more meaningful as they could be linked with recognizable experiences as well as being underpinned by research rigor (Cushion, 2001). Only minor editing procedures were performed on the data, such as deleting names and references that threatened the anonymity of individuals, or personal references to members of the club made during the interviews.

5.6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section of the chapter aims to explore the dominant themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. The results and discussion are presented together, and findings are represented and consequently synthesized with relation to appropriate conceptual and theoretical material (Mitchell, 2014). The results from the collected data are represented using direct quotations, which offer contextual meaning and demonstrate the depth of the responses (Scanlan, et al., 1989). Within this study, the data collected via the interviews and focus groups with players, staff, and parents was analysed and presented separately. However, links between the data sets will be discussed as part of the summary and conclusions.

5.6.1 Player's perceptions of the psychological development program

Three key themes emerged as a function of the evaluation sheets, focus groups, and interviews that were conducted with players in the YDP (U13-U16), and PDP (U18-U23). The following table demonstrates the process of developing the themes from first-order, and second-order categories (Mitchell, 2015).

Table 2. Player's evaluation of the psychological development program

First-order category	Second-order category	General dimension
Speak about feelings		Communication
Non-judgmental		
Willingness to listen		
Understanding of development		
Understand why	Decision Making	Self-Awareness
Think about lifestyle		
Take responsibility		
New perspective		
Individual sessions	Contents	Mechanical Aspects
Goal-Setting		
Time constraints		
Team discussions		

5.6.1.1 Communication

The first theme that will be discussed is 'communication'. A number of players across the age groups at Burrington City FC suggested that the psychological development program had facilitated communication. More specifically, this referred to players being granted the option to

speak more openly about their emotions confidentially. The following quote from Aaron, an U18 player demonstrates this...

“Since the psychology program started we get the chance to talk about what is going on, not only at football but also in our lives in general. We all know that people get affected by things, but before no-one dared to show that because we all wanted to be seen as the ‘big dog’. Since you’ve been here that’s kind of changed. Its normal now to sit and speak to you, and like we know that when we leave the office nothing more will be mentioned of it”.

Other researchers have supported the use of sports psychology within professional sport contexts in enabling a performer to open up about their difficulties (Dale, 1996). Nesti (2004, 2010, 2012) suggested that players may demonstrate a reluctance to speak to a coach due to their capacity to make influential decisions regarding their future. Aaron highlighted the importance of confidentiality, and suggested that this played a significant role in his decision to talk about things that otherwise he may have kept private. Anderson *et al.* (2002) suggested that confidentiality is an essential aspect of sports psychology practice, however Eubank *et al.* (2014), and Pain and Harwood (2004) identified confidentiality as a barrier to its acceptance in elite sport environments. Aarons comments add a player’s perspective to the current literature base, and further support the suggestions of Anderson *et al.* (2002), and Nesti (2010). Closely related to this, a number of the players identified that a further benefit of the sports psychology program was the addition of an individual at the club who would listen to the players without casting judgement. As a result, the players felt that the environment was more inclusive, and supportive. Ollie, a first year scholar spoke about this during his interview...

“If we didn’t have the sports psychology program I’m not sure how I would have dealt with the stuff that I went through earlier this year. The day after my dad’s heart attack I got the bus into

Burrington City FC and pretended to the other lads it was just a normal day. I knew that once I got to the club I could come and talk to you about it, and sort out what was best to do. Even though it was difficult I knew that once I told you I would be looked after. Like if you weren't here there is no way I would have gone into the coaches and told them because I would have been scared of breaking down. I wouldn't have wanted them to see me like that in case they thought I was too emotional or it would affect my game. I probably wouldn't have bothered coming in for a few days and just sent a text to let the gaffer know why. I would have hidden away from it, tried not to expose myself if you know what I mean. But, like I actually wanted to come in because I knew here its supportive now. And when I did tell you and you spoke to the other staff, the managers came in and offered their support, and I appreciated that. I was more composed; I'd had time to let it all sink in. Even the 1st team manager asked me for a word a few days later to see how I was getting on."

A final quote from an U13 player expresses the consistency of this theme across the different age groups. During a focus group he stated...

"Now we have the psychology stuff it's different, I can tell you if I'm a bit nervous about playing up with the U14s on Sunday. I couldn't say that to the coaches cause they might not pick me, and I'm fighting with the other lads for a contract so I wouldn't want to tell them".

These quotations support the benefits of the psychological development program in facilitating the creation of a supportive and open environment. Players at Burrington City FC identified a shift in the culture since the introduction of the program, and believed that this was beneficial in helping them to identify, and speak up about the challenges that were facing.

5.6.1.2 Self-Awareness:

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis was ‘self-awareness’. It was commonly identified by players that the psychological development program required them to engage in a deeper, and more holistic level of thinking than they were used to. An example of this is a quotation taken from an interview with Doug, an U23 player...

“I used to make a lot of decisions [e.g., upload pictures of himself drinking to social media the evening before a game] that would get me in trouble, and I knew as soon as I’d done it that it was a silly thing to do. You haven’t told me what is right and wrong or what I should be doing but by discussing the impact of things, and trying to understand why I think I’ve learnt more about myself. I feel that I am more responsible in making the right decisions than I was before, and when I don’t I think more about it, rather than just trying to make everyone forget about it”.

A second quotation from Jon an U18 player further demonstrated how he had become more self-aware since the introduction of the psychological development program...

“If it (the psychological development program) wasn’t there for me personally I would be stuck in the same mentality that I was when I was an U15; getting frustrated, punching the floor, swearing at the ref. I’ve noticed a big difference over the last few years. Being encouraged to think about my football and my life made me take a long look at myself, and who I was. I started to realize that if I continued like that I had no chance of getting a pro. It was hard at first to accept that I was struggling, but by talking about my reactions to things I became more aware of when I was reacting bad and why. I ask for my clips now after a game not just so I can see the chances I missed but so I can see my body language too. All the time I’m learning what works and doesn’t work for me, and I’m more honest with myself about the decisions I make.”

One emphasis of the psychological development program was to encourage all individuals within the club to critically reflect on themselves and their development. Extensive reflective practice literature has highlighted a number of potential benefits of engaging in the process (Morgan, 2009). Firstly, researchers (Anderson, *et al.*, 2004) have suggested that reflective practice helps us to better understand our professional knowledge. Secondly, engaging in reflective practice encourages the development of personal knowledge, or self-awareness (Cushion, *et al.*, 2003). Finally, reflective practice helps us to evaluate the appropriateness of our actions. However, reflective practice research to date has focused on the experiences of trained professionals such as teachers, nurses, and applied practitioners (Anderson, *et al.*, 2001; Cropley, *et al.*, 2010; Cushion, *et al.*, 2003). The findings of this study suggest that there is scope for the introduction of reflective practice principles with elite athletes with the aim of developing their self-awareness.

5.6.1.3 Mechanical Aspects:

The final theme ‘mechanical aspects’ included the content of the psychological development program, and the actual delivery of the program across each season. Players in the younger age groups (YDP) critiqued the psychological development program that was delivered and highlighted the need for a greater level of support. Rico, an U13 player commented...

“Sometimes it’s annoying because we were scheduled each week to see you on a Wednesday, so if something happens on a Sunday we might think it’s really important to talk to you about it, but by the time we get to see you on a Wednesday it isn’t fresh in our minds anymore. Also, what we do on a Wednesday we have to wait until the Sunday until we can put it in practice in a game so we might forget things. If it was arranged so each age group got to see you at different times of the week that would work better”.

The findings from the younger age group were supported by the comments of one of the U23 players, Ryan stated...

“It was hard to see you sometimes, and given how bad I have been playing this season that has been hard. I play for the U23s on a Monday, then if the 1st team have a midweek game I travel on a Tuesday, then it’s a day off on a Wednesday. That only leaves a Thursday and Friday, and if the 1st team game on a Saturday is away we normally travel down on the Friday. Like, there’s one day in a week where I can see you, and if there is a workshop or you have other players I have to wait until the next week. I don’t know how to get around it but I definitely think that it would be good to see you more sometimes”.

The quotations presented above represent some of the challenges that I have faced as a sports psychology practitioner operating within a broader organisation over the past three years. The psychological development program was allocated set hours for each development phase across the week. This was determined prior to the implementation of the program through discussions with key stakeholders (academy director, head of departments). Given the many different aspects to talent development within professional football, there were often not enough hours in the day for players or staff to be flexible with their time. This inevitably impacted some of the player’s experiences of the program.

Although individuals agreed that a greater level of support was required, some of the players believed that this should be delivered through individual support sessions, whereas others identified group workshops as more favorable. Jimmy, an U15 player commented...

“I’m not the kind of player that will talk about much in front of the others so I would have benefitted from more individual stuff. The workshops give you ideas but you have to go away yourself and

figure out how you can apply it. The individual stuff I like because its specific to you, and it's made me realize how much of a difference it can make to your game".

In contrast to this, Dylan from the U14 age group stated...

"I like doing stuff in the groups cause it gets everyone together. We can all say what we think, like even some weeks when you said that there wasn't a topic, it was just a chat it was good because we all got to speak up, and it was an opportunity for us to say what we thought was going well and what we were doing bad so we like had a team focus".

Much of the psychological development program delivered to players in the YDP focused on group delivery. The rationale behind this was in line with Greenberg *et al.* (2003) that young adolescents have a more beneficial learning experience when they are with their peers as opposed to individually. Sports psychology research has highlighted the need to tailor interventions to individual needs (Anderson *et al.*, 2002). However, the feasibility of this when delivering a psychological development program to over 150 players with time constraints is questionable. The use of a number of sports psychologists specific to each stage of development may go a long way in addressing some of the issues raised above, although in reality it is argued that sports psychology has not yet reached this level of acceptance in professional football (Larsen, *et al.*, 2013; Nesti, 2012).

A final quotation from an U23 player Tom brings together the three different themes that were discussed by the players...

"When you first came I thought it was going to be pointless all the sports psychology stuff. I thought it would be like school, I had just started my scholar and strolled in thinking I would have another good year. I didn't anticipate the challenges I've been through over the last couple of

years. Sports psychology has helped me to understand them, and how to deal with them in a way that is personal to me. I've made some good and some bad decisions especially when I was a scholar, but you didn't give up on me. I don't think sports psychology is all about performance, it's the other side to it where I've found my benefit, like the personal stuff you know. It's made me feel valued to have someone ask how you're getting on and actually mean it, not just a coach asking cause they feel they have to. This year when they told me I was going on loan I felt ok about it, I knew how to handle it and that's cause of the workshops we did. If we hadn't done them I'd have gone home angry, and probably gone out and got drunk with my mates to take my mind of it. But I was clear about the process".

5.6.2 Staff Perspectives

Three general themes emerged from the data that was collected through the interviews and focus groups with staff at Burrington City FC. The following table demonstrates how each individual theme was constructed.

Table 2. Staff evaluation of the psychological development program

First-order category	Second-order category	General dimension
Interdepartmental discussions	Vehicle to bridge departments	Communication
Creation of a team		
Staff support		
Players molycoddled	Perceptions of sports psychology	Lack of importance
Gets in the way		
Modern society		Impact
Location of upbringing		
Can't be measured		

5.6.2.1 Communication

The first theme to emerge was ‘communication’. More specifically, this referred to the introduction of the psychological development program as a vehicle for communication between the different departments at Burrington City FC. For example, the head of academy sports science and medicine commented...

“The sports psychology program has encouraged us to move away from operating within our own departments and operate more as a whole team at an academy level. There are more frequent meetings where all departments come together to discuss player development rather than that only being done within each department”.

This was also mentioned by the head of education during a focus group discussion...

“The sports psychology program involves a range of aspects, and communicating with you I know that we all have a better understanding about each player individually because we are now telling each other things that we didn’t previously. Its encouraged us all to consider the player’s development in every area not just our own”.

As a result of the increased communication and integration of staff between departments it is suggested that Burrington City FC operated more as a team. The organisational role of the sports psychologist has been supported by a number of sports psychology researchers (Cruickshank, Collins, & Minten, 2013; Eubank, et al., 2014; Nesti, 2010; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Findings from their research has suggested that the sports psychologists are often allocated the role of bringing together different groups of people, and helping to organize the daily operations of the organisation. For Example, Nesti (2010) compared the sports psychologist to a human resources manager.

In addition to this, one of the coaches identified that the sports psychology program was not only a means for the players to seek psychological support, but that it had also been used by staff to seek support when appropriate. He commented...

“I have certainly noticed during the time that you have been here that there has been a change in staff behavior. A number of times, I’ve been in the canteen making a brew and one of the other coaches has come in and said that they’re having trouble with a player, or something at home. More and more often they have said that they are going to try and speak to you about it. Even for me, like naturally now I guess we come and talk to you if something is not going well without even realizing we do it. I’d say that most of us have conversations with you where we tell you things that we wouldn’t necessarily tell the others”.

At this point in the focus group the ex U18 manager spoke up...

“Even with my coaching badges, organizing them and things I would come and ask for your help sorting stuff out, it doesn’t feel embarrassing to ask you whereas I know if I asked the other coaches they would tear into me”.

This again supports the comments of Nesti (2010) that the sports psychologist may find themselves supporting a range of different staff in dealing with aspects of their own life. Prior to the implementation of the program this was not an allocated role, however it developed naturally over a period of time within the organisation.

5.6.2.2 Lack of Importance

The second theme is titled ‘lack of importance’ and emerged from frequent comments by staff in the focus group sessions. In contrast to data collected during the focus group sessions, staff did not speak about sports psychology as being of little value during the individual interviews. This may

be attributed to one of two reasons. Firstly, during the focus group sessions those who also took part in the individual interviews may have felt more comfortable in sharing negative perceptions because they had a support network around them. Secondly, individuals may have conformed to the views of the more dominant individuals during the focus groups in an attempt not to be isolated despite their true beliefs.

Within this theme the staff suggested that the sports psychology program was not important because it did not lead to the development of the 'right' type of player. In contrast, staff believed that players did not need psychological support, rather they needed to face up to and deal with challenges themselves. The U18 manager commented...

"Unless there is something seriously wrong with them I think they should be made to deal with it themselves. That's the difference in what players were like when I was a pro and now. It wasn't easy for me, I had tough times but you rolled up your sleeves and got on with it. There was none of this, 'ohh you can see this person or that person', it's all too soft these days. They don't have to do anything for themselves anymore. They don't even have to think".

This was supported by the current academy director. He had only been employed by the club for 18 months, and commented...

"I agree with that. I just think these day's mental health is used as an excuse. They can just say that they are struggling psychologically and no one dares question them. I think if a player is going from the U18s to the 1st team they have to be able to cope with that, and if they can't they need to figure out how to and quickly before they get thrown back down. Football is a brutal sport, and all this focus on the psychology that you see in the media, they just get mollicoddled these days. There's too much support available".

Over the last decade research within sports psychology (Collins & MacNamara, 2012; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Morgan et al., 2013; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014) has moved towards the idea that the youth development experiences of elite athletes are often non-linear. Within these complex and dynamic paths, there is increasing support for the idea that challenging experiences are desirable for long term psychological development. However, Collins and MacNamara (2012) made a distinction, and suggested that it is not the number of challenges that an individual experiences, it is the skills that they use to overcome the challenges that offers the best pathway to sporting success. Further to this, Henriksen *et al.* (2010) suggested that a challenging but supportive environment is optimal for successful talent development. More specifically, this means that talented potential might benefit from, or require a variety of challenges (e.g., de-selection, failure) to result in successful adult performance (Collins & MacNamara, 2012), on the condition that athletes are appropriately supported through these situations (e.g., psychological support, stakeholder support network). It is the responsibility of the support network around the players to help them develop the necessary skills that they need to overcome each challenge that they face. However, some of the staff at Burrington City FC did not believe that there was a need for support, they only saw the need for a challenge. The findings suggest that this is due to their deep rooted attitudes and beliefs.

Coaches in the YDP, and PDP further suggested that the sports psychology program was too time consuming and took up valuable coaching time with the players. An assistant coach in the PDP commented...

“They miss out on their ball striking now before training cause they’re in the classroom doing the psychology stuff. Don’t get me wrong I’m not saying it’s not important, but they’re training to be footballers they need to be out on the pitch as much as possible”.

The head of coaching for the YDP supported this...

“It’s like the coaching isn’t as important anymore, you’ve got the sports scientists take them one night, you take them another, and then after training there’s a list of players for you guys to see. It’s just eating away into time; us coaches have to accept that’s the way the modern game is going but are we really seeing better players at the end of it?”.

Although coaches were delivering more than the number of coaching hours required by the EPPP, they still believed that other aspects of talent development impacted and affected their role. Some of these suggestions supported the findings of Pain and Harwood (2004) and Roderick (2006). For example, sports psychology was viewed as the least important discipline by the coaches at Burrington City FC, and was seen as a hindrance to their technical and tactical development as players. These entrenched attitudes were similar to those found by Roderick (2006) when he explored the lived experiences of youth football apprentices.

5.6.2.3 Impact

The final theme ‘impact’ referred to the scope of the psychological development program in influencing player development, and the visible effectiveness of the program. It was commonly reported by the coaches that the sports psychology development program had little impact in developing individual characteristics that were desirable at Burrington City FC. The coaches displayed a strong belief that it was only the players upbringing and background that would influence these. For example, one full time coach commented...

“I think who they are and the skills they have all come down to their background. By that I mean where they are from. Sports psychology can’t make someone tough, their life experience does that. You’ve got the scouse lads here that go home and fight with the other lads on their street after

training, they have to look after their brothers and sisters, and go to some of the roughest schools. That's what gives them their grit and character. You can see it, the lads from middle class families don't know what tough means. You can't just change someone like that to get those skills, it's a process that occurs right from the day they are born."

Another coach shared the same viewpoint, and included modern society as a factor that has resulted in the "mentally weak generation". He stated

"It's just the way society is these days. The kids get their teas cooked for them, they sit on their backsides texting their mates. None of it is face to face anymore, when we were kids we used to work to earn money to put food on the table. We learnt the hard way, and then when the going got tough after 85 minutes you could cope. It wasn't a challenge, these days they're not used to pressure, or competition. At school it's all about fairness, it's not about winning. If you want to be a footballer you have to know how to win, sports psychology isn't going to do that. Part of it is genetic, the rest depends on the life they have had".

From the data collection methods, it became clear that these beliefs had been formed before the introduction of the psychological development program, and were not as a function of the support that was delivered. However, the psychological development program had failed to change these deep-rooted attitudes and beliefs. It is suggested that the characteristic that these coaches were speaking about was mental toughness. Some mental toughness researchers (Bull et al., 2005; Gucciardi, et al., 2009) identified the importance of developmental experiences in developing mental toughness. However, they also supported the development of other psychological skills in order to help players cope with setbacks. Crust *et al.* (2010) investigated mental toughness in a range of young players in an English Premier League Football Academy. They found that there was not a significant difference in the level of mental toughness in older players with more life

experience, and there was no difference in the level of mental toughness between players who were retained or released. In conclusion, each of these researchers suggested that the organisational structure and culture of a sporting organisation may play a pivotal role in supporting the development of mental toughness.

Finally, it was acknowledged by staff that it was very difficult for them to judge the effectiveness of the program due to the difficulties in measuring psychological change. One coach commented...

“It’s a really difficult question, because I could say that the sports scientists do a good job if players scores get better, but I can’t say to you he has gotten more confident because my opinion might be different to someone else. You can’t actually see what is inside someone’s head it’s all down to interpretation”.

A second coach supported this, he stated...

“What we can’t judge is what goes on when we aren’t there. With everything being confidential you may have done some great work with a player that I never know about. Even with the psychology stuff that has been delivered to us guys, I don’t know if I’m necessarily a better coach. I am more educated about sports psychology, and I would say I think about it more in my coaching but I don’t know how to answer whether that means that the program is effective”.

Previous research (Anderson *et al.*, 2002; Chandler, 2014; Partington & Orlick, 1987) has highlighted challenges in evaluating the effectiveness of applied sports psychology delivery, due to difficulties in objectively measuring change. Partington and Orlick (1987) highlighted the importance of attaining a range of stakeholder’s perceptions in order to attain a more holistic view. In previous research (Gould *et al.*, 1991; Weigand *et al.*, 1999) personal characteristics of the sports psychologist have been identified as determining the consultant’s effectiveness. However,

in this study it was the psychological development program that was the focus of the investigation as opposed to the consultant.

5.6.3 Parent perspectives

Finally, data is presented that was collected through the focus groups of parents in the YDP (U13-U16). Three key themes emerged from the data collection; Inclusivity, Holistic focus, and Mechanical aspects. In line with the previous data sets, the table below demonstrates how these themes were constructed.

Table 4. Parent evaluation of the psychological development program

First-order category	Second-order category	General dimension
Approachable individual	Communication	Inclusivity
Part of child's development		
Feedback		
Education		
Lifestyle management	Athlete Identity	Holistic Focus
Honest approach		
Deal with pressure		
Attendance		Mechanical Aspects
Individual Support		

5.6.3.1 Inclusivity

The first theme that arose from the focus groups was titled 'inclusivity'. Parents feedback suggested that through the introduction of the sports psychology program they were now more

involved in their child's development. For example, a number of parents spoke about feeling comfortable in getting in touch with myself regarding any concerns they had about their child. For example, an U13 players parent stated...

“When Dylan was really struggling with mine and his father's separation earlier this season I felt confident that I had someone at the club that I could contact about it. Before, I wouldn't have told the coaches what he was going through because I would have been scared that they might think Dylan needs to be stronger than that. I knew that I could give you a call and let you know that Dylan was struggling at home, and the difficulties we were going through as a family, that made me feel like there was a strong support network”.

Although a player welfare officer has been employed at Burrington City FC for a number of years, he also occupies the role of club secretary and part time coach. This might have explained the reluctance to approach an individual such as this about their concerns. Previous research by Côté (1999) has highlighted the role that the family plays in talent development, and the importance of acknowledging the important role they hold. Furthermore, parents also acknowledged the benefits of the psychological development program in increasing their awareness of the player's development through measures such as the player profiling procedure. One of the U15 player's parents commented...

“Jay came home after they had done the profiling and showed me his results, and he's quite a shy person so I didn't expect him to do that. When he showed me what he had put and what the coaches had, it gave me a clearer picture of his development. I remember noticing that he had scored himself quite low for confidence. I didn't mention it to Jay, but me and his dad spoke about it and we made sure that we were really positive with him for the few weeks after. I think little touches like that have made a big difference to our experience as a player's parent”.

Finally, parents provided positive feedback on the education program that they received as part of the broader psychological development program. A parent in the U16 age group commented...

“I feel more like I can play a positive role in Charlie’s development now, because I understand the different things that he may be feeling or going through and I know how to support him. I used to focus a lot on his performance and ask him a lot of questions if he had a bad game. Now I let him talk to me about it if he wants to, I’m much more positive with him and I think that has taken away from some of the pressure he experienced.”

A second parent noted...

“Because we understand more about the mental side of the game and the program that is being delivered to the lads I feel more confident in speaking to him about his experiences. I don’t feel like an interfering parent anymore”.

These comments support the use of the psychological development program. Harwood, and Knight (2015) explored parenting in youth sport and suggested that appropriate parenting styles, healthy relationships, and level of involvement were all significant influencing factors on their child’s sport experiences. They further suggested that in order to become an expert in sport parenting education was needed to help develop knowledge and skills. The psychological development program that was delivered aimed to facilitate the development of these skills, whilst also supporting parents through the process.

5.6.3.2 Holistic Focus

One of the most dominant aspects of the parent focus groups was the importance of the program in taking a holistic approach to player development. Parents provided positive feedback on the lifestyle management workshops, and stressed that the message was clear to players and parents

that the club valued the development of people in addition to just the development of footballers. One of the U13 parents commented...

“By doing the sports psychology program Dan (his son) now knows the importance of working at school, he is starting to believe that a good life outside of football will lead to success at football, that makes it much easier for us as parents. He thinks the world of Burrington City FC and if you show that you think something is important he does too”.

The importance of a holistic approach to development also incorporated the benefits of an honest approach about talent development. One U15 parent supported this and stated...

“It was the day that you looked at the pictures of the scholars from the last few years in the classroom with them that had the biggest impact on Lewis. He realised that day that if he was going to make it he needed to start to become more professional, and he needed to make sure the other parts of his life were strong to give him a back-up plan. Lewis came home after training and told me he didn’t want all the junk food no more, he started focusing much more on his diet, he would do his extra strength program without me asking him. He also started to actually speak about his school subjects to me, before if I asked him about school he would just put his headphones in. I think that made him mature quickly”.

Another parent agreed...

“Yeah, by being honest with them, they know the amount of work they have to put in, and they don’t just automatically think they have made it”.

These comments highlight that the parents believed it was important for the players to develop a broader identity than that of a professional footballer, and support previous literature on athlete identity (Erikson, 1968; Littlewood & Nesti, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2014). Parent’s demonstrated

an understanding of the brutality of professional football, and the small number of academy players who go on to have a successful professional career in the game (Haugaasen, et al., 2014). Furthermore, the parents believed that an effective method of broadening the player's identity was through education by the club. It was a common belief by the parents that players looked up to key stakeholders within Burrington City FC, and were therefore more likely to be influenced by the suggestions of these individuals, than their own as a parent. This supports Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) talent development model, who highlight the increasing role of the coach as young players progress into and through adolescence.

In addition to this, parents suggested that the breadth of the program and support in dealing with issues outside of football served to reduce the pressure that players were experiencing in regards to their general life, but also as a function of their performances. One of the U16 parents commented...

“Will came home and said that after his review session you had mentioned that he should think about seeing his friends more. At first this really confused me, I asked him why. Will said that you asked him to choose an area of his life to focus on improving in the next few weeks. And he said that when he thought about the question he didn't know how to answer, he said the only thing that he would change would be to see his friends more but he didn't want to take away from his football. I think since then Will has spent a lot more time with his friends. Rather than playing against them on the Xbox and speaking on the console, he goes around to theirs or they come to ours to play so they spend time together. He has a lot more to talk about now than always football, football, football”.

Again, Will was broadening his identity as opposed to solely viewing himself through the lens of an academy footballer. This was in line with the suggestions of Erikson (1978) who identified the

need for adolescents to develop a broad identity, and place value on different areas of their life. The parents had supported this research, and identified its importance particularly when their child was yet to receive a professional contract.

5.6.3.3 Mechanical Aspects

The final theme related to the mechanical aspects of the program delivery. More specifically, some of the parents highlighted the challenges that they faced in bringing their child to the club an hour before training. She stated...

“I’m a single mum, I have to pick the kids up from school, feed them, and then it takes us over an hour to get here on a good day. So Sam never gets here in time for the workshops, and because his school don’t allow day release he rarely gets the chance to do any of the program”.

Another parent supported this and commented...

“Sometimes it’s asking a lot as were now here at 4.45 three days a week so they can do the gym and the psychology stuff. Our Chris is only 12. Sometimes I feel like its demanding too much”.

This relates to the time constraints of the program and the demand of fitting in the program as part of a broader talent development framework. The players at Burrington City FC are not schooled at the club, and although a number of players attend their day release sessions some school’s don’t believe it is appropriate. This poses a number of challenges for the delivery of the program, and ensuring that each player receives a similar level of support. Previous literature (Pain & Harwood, 2004; Mellalieu, 2017; Nesti, 2004) within sports psychology has identified the difficulties of delivering sports psychology consultancy within time constraints. As noted previously, the delivery of the program on a large scale added to some of these challenges.

The second factor with regards to mechanical aspects was the contents of the program. One of the parents identified the need for more individual support sessions...

“my child is one of the quieter in his age group, and I know after some of the workshops he’s come home and said he wished he could have said certain things but he gets overpowered by the louder players. For him he would benefit from more individual sessions”.

However, this was not supported by another parent, in contrast he said...

“I think the mix is good because in any job they will have to work as part of a team and having discussions at this age starts to help them get skills they will need when they’re older”.

The content of the program was designed to provide a balance between the different consultancy approaches, but also work within the broader constraints of Burrington City FC as an organisation. It is clear from the feedback within this subsection that a level of confusion was present between how, and when the program may be best delivered. The parents discussed the need for the program to be tailored to each individual, but also accepted that this was not possible with only one individual employed to deliver the program across the 150 academy players.

5.7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the current chapter was to critically evaluate the psychological development program that was implemented and delivered across the duration of the PhD. The perspectives of players, support staff, and parents were attained to provide an in-depth overview using a range of stakeholder’s. This study presented a clear shift in methodological approach when compared to chapter 2, 3, and 4. A more traditional approach to the data collection, data analysis, and representation was used. For example, interviews and focus groups were used to collect the data, and there was a shift in the representation style away from the use of first person writing.

A number of researchers have highlighted the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of sports psychology services in order to improve their own practice, and provide the best possible service to clients (Anderson *et al.*, 2002; Chandler, 2014; Partington & Orlick, 1987). The BPS support previous research, and in their practice guidelines it is noted that critical evaluation is an essential component of an applied sports psychologists work. Further to this, the BPS suggested that all interventions should be evaluated following their implementation and delivery. However, prior to this research, consultancy evaluation research focused on the evaluation of the sports psychology consultant as an individual (e.g., Chandler, 2014; Gould *et al.*, 1991; Weigand *et al.*, 1999), or short-term interventions (e.g., Brewer & Shillinglaw, 1992). In contrast to previous literature, this research adds an in-depth evaluation of a longitudinal bespoke sports psychology development program using a range of stakeholder perceptions.

The findings from this thesis demonstrate some similarities in the perceptions across the different stakeholders (players, support staff, parents) that took part in the data collection. Firstly, communication was identified by both players and support staff at Burrington City FC as a benefit of the psychological development program. More specifically, both sets of participants highlighted the program's value in facilitating communication between individuals at the club, and enabling players to feel more comfortable in sharing their emotions. Furthermore, the players and support staff mentioned that the psychological development program provided them with a level of support that they had not had previously. Interestingly, the support staff spoke about the value of the program beyond the education workshops that were delivered, and suggested that they used the program to seek individual support in appropriate situations. This finding supports and builds upon the suggestions of Nesti (2010). Based on extensive experience working in Premiership football he identified that sports psychologists often employ a number of unexpected organisational type

roles. The support staff within this study supported this by speaking about themselves seeking out the sports psychologist to discuss their own challenging situations, and help to organize a range of aspects of their life.

Mechanical aspects were noted as a theme across all three sets of participants. Data collected through the interviews, and focus groups highlighted a number of challenges that participants had experienced with regards to the delivery of the program. Players, support staff, and parents all identified that the program was constrained by time. This finding was supported by previous research (Nesti, 2010; Pain & Harwood, 2004; Ravizza, 1990) which highlighted that practical constraints have restricted and limited the opportunities for sports psychologist's to be effective. This is particularly evident when the sports psychologist attempts to deliver more than mental skills training using singular or short interventions (Andersen, 2000; Ravizza, 1990). More specifically, players and parents believed that the program was not flexible, and not enough time was allocated to its delivery. However, the coaches that took part in the study did not agree. In contrast, they believed that the psychological development program was taking up valuable coaching time and believed that there needed to be a more effective way of incorporating it within the youth development framework at Burrington City FC. The beliefs of the coaches with regards to the delivery of sports psychology within the current talent development framework were in line with previous research that has highlighted barriers to sports psychology practice (e.g., Gill, 1994; Nesti, 2010, 2012; Pain & Harwood, 2004), and supports Pain and Harwood's (2004) finding that sports psychology is viewed as the least important aspect of player development by this group of stakeholders.

With relation to the contents of the program, players and parents suggested that it could be tailored more to the individual client. However, across the data collected some individuals believed that

this would be best delivered via group workshops, however others identified the need for further individual support sessions. The EPPP handbook does not provide any guidelines regarding the methods of sports psychology delivery, and therefore further research on how to balance meeting the requirements of the EPPP, but also satisfying the needs of players would be beneficial. More specifically, this may explore the development of more appropriate guidelines to inform a sport psychologist's work with players across the different development phases (FP, YDP, PDP). It is understood that different practitioners will have different methods of working, and that player's will face a unique set of challenges as they progress within professional football clubs. However, more in-depth baseline guidance would support a level of consistency in the delivery of sport psychology support in professional football in the UK. The support staff were most critical of the program contents, in particular the coaches. They suggested that the psychological development program, and the discipline as a whole had little scope to influence player development. From the findings in chapter 3, it is suggested that some of the participants were inferring me also. This belief was manifested in practice, for example during my encounter with Tony (U18 manager) when he suggested that if any player approached me with an issue that I was to inform him and he would deal with them accordingly. More specifically, they believed that it was only through their life experiences, and home background that players would develop characteristics such as resilience. A number of potential reasons may be attributed to this viewpoint. Firstly, the coaches as individuals held values, attitudes, and beliefs that proved reluctant to change, and formed the broader culture within Burrington City FC (Roderick, 2006). Secondly, many of the coaches employed at Burrington City FC are ex-professional footballers themselves and had not previously been exposed to sports psychology. These individuals spoke about having to deal with challenging experiences on their own, and that this contributed to their development, a result of this may be

the belief that current youth footballers need to do the same. Further to this, the coaches were skeptical of the discipline as a whole. This would support the findings of Nesti (2010, 2012), and Pain and Harwood (2004), and may be attributed to a lack of knowledge or understanding. This aspect of the findings is at odds with current research in sports psychology, which highlights the need for athletes to be exposed to challenging situations, but in a supportive environment (Henrikson, et al., 2010). However, it is interesting to note that the individual interviews that were conducted with the coaches did not always replicate the views offered in the focus groups. Some of those coaches who nodded along and agreed with the damning views of more powerful individuals in the focus groups, expressed a different and more positive approach during the individual interviews.

In summary, chapter 5 used evaluation forms, interviews, and focus groups to attain the perspectives of key stakeholders (parents, players, and staff) on the efficacy of the psychological development program that was delivered. The findings from this study suggest that the psychological development of players is a very complex process influenced and shaped by the beliefs, values, and attitudes of a range of stakeholders. Each of the stakeholders shared similarities, and differences in the feedback that they provided, and suggestions on how sports psychology might be used more effectively in the future. These differences in opinion may be attributed to each stakeholder having different expectations of the psychological development program, and a desire for it to be tailored to their own individual needs. Taken together, the findings align with the previous chapters of the thesis. For example, comments by the coaches support their behavior towards myself and players that were highlighted in chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis. Furthermore, an authoritarian style of management and belief that players needed to possess certain characteristics in order to be successful was demonstrated in the coaches' responses.

Chapter 6 will build upon chapter 5, and the other chapters of the thesis to outline the key findings of the thesis, and associated implications.

CHAPTER 6- DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter of the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the research findings that have been presented in each of the previous chapters. Further to this, the implications of the thesis are discussed in relation to applied sports psychology and professional training pathways. Finally, limitations of the research are identified, and potential avenues for future research highlighted.

6.1 Aims of the Thesis

The findings from the thesis are drawn together and considered with regards to the original objectives of the research. The aims of the research were as follows:

- 1) To deepen the current understanding on how applied sports psychology practitioners may best operate within the unique culture of professional football.
- 2) Critically explore the use of practitioner-researcher ethnography as a research method in applied sports psychology.
- 3) To explore the perceptions of players and practitioners (e.g. academy staff and coaches) within a professional football club on the psychological development of youth team players at distinctive phases of the football career.
- 4) To document the design, implementation, delivery, and evaluation of a bespoke psychological development program employed within a professional football club.
- 5) To capture the impact of a trainee applied sports psychology practitioner's experiences of working within professional football on practitioner identity and professional development over a longitudinal period.

Chapter 1 of the thesis reviewed existing research that was relevant to the objectives of the study, and exposed gaps in the current literature base that demonstrated the importance and relevance of this research project. Following on from this, Chapter 2 was an empirical research chapter that explored the use of practitioner-researcher ethnography as a research method. This chapter addressed aim (2) of the research, and presented practitioner-researcher reflections on the following aspects, entering the setting, insider vs outsider, dual role, and moral and ethical dilemmas.

Chapter 3 addressed aim (1) and aim (5) of the thesis. More specifically, chapter 3 used creative narratives to illuminate how my experiences of sports psychology delivery within one professional football club shaped my professional development and identity as a sports psychology practitioner. This chapter was based on data collected across the three-year duration of the PhD study, data collection methods included, observations, field notes, and a reflective log. Chapter 4 followed the same structure as chapter 3, and addressed aim (1), and aim (3) of the thesis. This chapter documented the lived experiences of elite youth level footballers within Burrington City FC. A series of narratives explored the impact of player's experiences on their identity, psychological development, and behaviors within the organisation. Data collection methods included; observations, field notes, a reflective log, and informal interviews.

Finally, chapter 5 addressed aims (1), (3), and (4) of the thesis. A more traditional methodological approach was used, involving; semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and evaluation forms. More specifically, this chapter explored the design, implementation, and evaluation of the psychological development program that was delivered within Burrington City FC. With regards to the evaluation of the program, players, support staff, and parent's perspectives were attained.

6.2 Key Findings

The following section presents a number of key findings that emerged from the thesis. These are discussed with relation to youth development in professional football, or professional training and education for applied sports psychologists. It is hoped that these findings will make a novel and original contribution to our current understanding of the delivery of sports psychology within professional football cultures.

6.2.1 Youth development in professional football

Firstly, the findings from this thesis highlight the complexities of youth development in professional football. It may be argued that psychological development is not an exact science, rather it is a complex and messy process influenced by a range of factors (Nesti, 2010). In other disciplines, such as chemistry or physics, the relationship between cause and effect is easily identifiable. However, within the field of psychology, an individual's values, beliefs, and opinions shape their perceptions (Dietz, et al., 1998) and subsequent behavior. Findings across chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the thesis demonstrate this. More specifically, there was a level of confusion across the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the efficacy of the psychological development program that was delivered. While some of the participants believed that there was an adequate level of support, others highlighted the need for greater support. Yet, between those who identified the need for greater support, there were further discrepancies regarding the nature of delivery (e.g., individual support sessions or group workshops). Generally, there were consistencies in the feedback provided by players, and parents, especially with regards to the benefit of the psychological development program in facilitating communication, and creating a more supportive environment. In addition to this, both the players and the parents emphasized the benefit of the program in addressing personal development in addition to performance enhancement. Each of these findings were demonstrated in chapter 4, which explored the lived experiences of youth players. The

narratives that were presented in chapter 4 demonstrated the challenges that players faced beyond their current level of performance, rather, as a result of the culture that they existed within. However, this view was not supported by interviews that were conducted with staff at Burrington City FC, in contrast they believed that the psychological development program had little impact and that it was other uncontrollable factors (e.g., social class, location of upbringing) that would determine psychological development and eventual success as a player. In summary, it is suggested that the delivery of a psychological development program within an organisation is a complex and challenging process (Andersen, 2000). Individual differences, values, and opinions will shape how each stakeholder believes that the program should be delivered. For the sports psychologist operating in this role, finding a balance across all of these things may be a difficult and lengthy process.

From the findings that emerged through my own experiences, the lived experiences of players, and feedback from a range of stakeholders, it is suggested that despite considerable changes in professional football over recent years (e.g., introduction of the EPPP, global growth, increasing finances), the traditional masculine culture of the environment at Burrington City FC has remained the same. In 2012, the Premier League introduced the EPPP as a new youth development framework. The EPPP provided guidance on all aspects of practice, and formalized the delivery of psychological support. However, the findings from this study regarding the professional football culture supported those of Cushion (2001), who explored coaching practice, and Roderick (2006) who explored the lived experiences of youth apprentices. More specifically, the authoritarian management style, demonstration of power, dominance, and control, and punishments for not adhering to orders were all dominant cultural features within this thesis. In particular, it was generally the behavior of coaches employed within Burrington City FC that aligned with these

cultural features. Despite research conducted by Cushion, Roderick, and others (Gearing, 1999; Parker, 1995, 1996) suggesting that this was not beneficial for player development, the introduction of the EPPP appeared to have little to no impact on changing the beliefs and behaviors of these individuals. There are a number of potential reasons to explain this. Firstly, a number of the coaches employed at Burrington City FC had progressed through the club's youth system before either having a successful playing career or being released. Upon their retirement, these individuals had been offered the opportunity to transition into a coaching role at Burrington City FC. Therefore, a number of the coaches have spent much of their life as a part of the organisation in either a playing or coaching role. It was suggested by Gearing (1999) that professional football clubs are total institutions, and that the members within it are often socialized into a certain way of thinking and acting that is in line with the dominant beliefs and values of the organisation. Having been involved with the club for between 20 and 30 years, it may be suggested that they have developed hegemonic beliefs that are reluctant to change. Secondly, the development experiences of the coaches when they were aspiring young footballers may have influenced their views on the way in which a coach must behave, or the life experiences that result in footballing success (Pain & Harwood, 2004). The statements by some of the coaches in chapter 5 support this idea, for example, when one of the coaches spoke about having to roll up your sleeves and deal with the challenges that you experience on your own. The final explanation is a lack of understanding of sports psychology topics, and its value in youth player development. This suggestion is supported by Pain and Harwood (2004) who noted that coaches were reluctant to integrate sports psychology within their clubs, due to a perceived lack of importance, and lack of understanding of topics that fall outside the general coaching domain.

As a result of the findings in chapter 4 and chapter 5 of the thesis, it is suggested that counselling psychology (Woolfe, et al., 2003) may play an important role in supporting elite youth footballers. In my experiences, players required more than the delivery of MST to address the challenges that they were facing, and in this regard individual counselling sessions were most appropriate. Previous research (Chandler, 2014; Corlett, 1996; Hack, 2005; Katz & Hemmings, 2009; Nesti, 2010) has highlighted the important contribution that counselling psychology can make to sports psychology, particularly with relation to the formation, and maintenance of professional relationships. Findings from the evaluation of the psychological development program suggested that an important part of my role was communication and the development of relationships. Rogers (1957) highlighted the importance of the client-practitioner relationship, and identified three personal qualities that are pivotal for the sports psychologist engaging in counselling psychology; genuineness, non-judgmental care, and empathy. Stakeholders further supported this during the evaluation, particularly the players who highlighted the value of having an individual at the club who they could confide in confidentially, and know that they would not make judgements. These findings suggest that the players valued the humanistic counselling approach that I employed. Anderson *et al.* (2004) suggested that athletes often value the opportunity to engage in counselling related interventions, especially with regards to issues outside of sport.

6.2.2 Professional training and education

One of the original objectives of the thesis was to explore practitioner development and identity over a longitudinal time-frame. Williams and Anderson (2012) highlighted the importance of this, and suggested that a deeper understanding of professional identity development would be beneficial for the future education and training of applied sports psychology practitioners. An understanding of how practitioners identity develops and is shaped as a function of their

experiences during their initial years following graduation might help us to better prepare other aspiring sport psychology practitioners. My experiences as a neophyte sports psychology practitioner were located against, and support the use of the identity capital model (Côté, 2016). More specifically, this research suggested that identity is not a distinct end point that we reach at the conclusion of our professional training. In contrast, identity was argued to be a fluid concept continually evolving based upon the experiences that we have. In line with the identity capital model (Côté, 2016), I believe that each experience that we are exposed to, whether positive or negative, helps us to build our capital, and better equip ourselves to deal with challenging situations that may arise in the future. More specifically, those negative experiences that challenge and shape us as individuals are equally as important as positive experiences, it is these events that require us to engage in a deeper level of reflection, consider who we are, and how we can move forward as applied practitioners. In relation to this, the narratives presented within chapter 3 represent my development as a sports psychology practitioner. Initially, I entered the organisation with the aim of trying to fit in and be well-liked. Deep reflection (Tashman & Cremades, 2016), and discussion with my supervisors helped me to understand that this was my way of overcoming my own insecurities regarding my ability as an applied practitioner. However, as time went on, and I experienced a range of critical moments, my focus within the organisation shifted. I placed a greater emphasis on my own values, and beliefs, and used these as a basis for me to do what I believed was important, care for the players. This was because I no longer felt the need to be accepted by key stakeholders within the organisation. In contrast, I had strong and meaningful relationships with a range of individuals outside of Burrington City FC (e.g., friends, family, supervisors) who held similar beliefs and attitudes to myself, and used these as a basis for my social identity (Tajfel, 1982). As a result of this, I was more accepting of being different within

the professional football club. The effort that I had previously put into developing relationships had taken away from my focus on delivering psychological support to those who needed it the most (the players). Therefore, shifting my focus within Burrington City FC influenced how I operated as an applied practitioner. Over time I became more authentic in my actions. For example, I made decisions based on what I believed was the right thing to do, as opposed to what the coaches would have deemed appropriate. As a result of this, I was no longer impacted in the same way by events that at the start of the process would have left me questioning my future position as a sports psychology practitioner. I was receiving positive feedback from the players, and had developed trusting relationships with them. These relationships were of great value to me, and I used the strength of my client-practitioner relationships as one determinant of whether my practice was effective.

My identity both as a sports psychology practitioner, and as a person influenced my approach to practice, and the environment. More specifically, I entered Burrington City FC with a number of beliefs, values, and hopes for my role (Cropley, et al., 2016). As noted in the biographical positioning, an example of this was my philosophy of practice. I employed a holistic humanistic consulting approach that placed a clear focus on the development of the person, as well as performance enhancement based on the sporting experiences of myself, and my family (Ravizza, 2002). For example, the deeply significant personal challenges faced by a family member when he was contracted as a player to Burrington City FC. These left me with strong beliefs regarding the need to support young players on a deeper level than performance enhancement, through the demonstration a caring and supportive approach to enhance their well-being and personal development. In line with this, it is suggested that another individual employed with the role of delivering psychological support at Burrington City FC might have had a different experience to

myself. Their beliefs, values, and consultancy approach would inevitably each have a significant influence on their experiences within the organisation, and the challenges that they may face. In line with this, and from my own observations, it is suggested that a high level of self-awareness would help practitioners to enhance the effectiveness of their applied practice (e.g. facilitate the development of effective problem solving, and decision making skills). An exploration of why practitioners have developed their beliefs, values, and ideals during professional training might help us as individuals to better understand how our own backgrounds are influencing applied practice, whether that be positively or negatively. This has importance for supervisors of those engaging in professional training, as it might inform the supervision and support methods that are employed.

Based on the findings of this research, it is suggested that sports psychologists at all stages of their career must possess an excellent understanding of the culture that they are embedded within. This suggestion is in line with previous research in sports psychology and organisational culture (Chandler, 2014; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Nesti, 2010, 2012; Mitchell, 2015). However, other than the work of Nesti (2010, 2012), these suggestions did not arise from the researchers own applied practice experiences. In contrast, this research project explored the experiences of self, and players within the organisation over a longitudinal period of full time engagement. The results demonstrate that the common challenges that were highlighted with chapter 3, and chapter 4, occurred as a result of the organisational culture within the professional football club. The findings from within these chapters present a number of potential reasons as to why an understanding of culture is so important for the practitioner.

Firstly, the culture in which a sports psychology practitioner operates will inevitably influence their role and working practices (Chandler, et al., 2016). For example, organisational restraints

may limit the sports psychologists work. An example of this may be the areas in which a sports psychologist is granted access, or the time that is allocated to conduct support sessions. In my experience, it was made clear that at no point was a sports psychology workshop or individual session allowed to run into the time allocated for coaching, and players were not to be removed from a coaching session to take part in anything sports psychology related. An understanding of this helped to prevent any conflict regarding delivery time. Requirements such as this may not be present in other sports organisations, but without an understanding of the unwritten rules, it is suggested that sports psychologists may find it more challenging to develop strong(er) working relationships (Nesti, 2010). Furthermore, the dominant cultural beliefs and values within an organisation may also lend itself more to different delivery approaches. For example, one culture may be very performance driven, and therefore only engage with a sports psychologist whose work is centered upon performance enhancement (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). However, another sporting organisation with a different culture may emphasize the importance of holistic development, which would lend itself to a sports psychologist who considers the growth of the person as opposed to solely athletic performance (Danish & Male, 1981). A greater emphasis on this during professional training may support the development of self-aware practitioners who have a clear understanding of the sporting culture that they enter, and how their consulting philosophy, personal values, and beliefs may be perceived within that specific context.

Secondly, the findings from this research suggest that a sports psychologist may face a number of deeply challenging experiences as a result of the culture that they operate within. Eubank *et al.* (2014) supported this, and suggested that experiencing elite sport cultures for the first time can be both daunting and challenging for neophyte sports psychology practitioners. An in-depth understanding of culture attained through professional training and education before entering the

applied field would be beneficial in increasing practitioner awareness, and potentially preventing some of the experiences of isolation and loneliness that may be a result of these cultures. Practically, culture might be embedded within professional training routes in the UK (e.g. BASES competency profile, BPS viva), and be addressed as a core workshop or through a series of webinars. Within these workshops/webinars guest speakers may discuss their experiences of working within a range of sport cultures at elite and non-elite levels with different client populations. Furthermore, trainees may be presented with case studies, and have to consider how they would operate within a challenging cultural situation, or discuss how they believe it may impact them, both personally and as an applied sport psychology practitioner. Finally, developing current reflective practice mechanisms within the BPS and BASES to incorporate more specific judgment not only on self-reflection, but also to consider the environment would be beneficial.

In recent years, researchers (Chandler, 2014; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Nesti, 2010, 2012; Tod et al., 2017) have suggested that an understanding of organisational psychology would be beneficial for applied sports psychologists. More frequently, sports psychology practitioners are being required to operate in a role more akin to that of an organisational psychologist (Chandler, 2014), particularly within the professional football culture (Nesti, 2010). Without an understanding of organisational psychology, and in turn organisational culture, a sports psychologist may not be effective in this role. Data from the empirical chapters of this thesis support the need for applied sports psychology practitioners to be aware of, and able to deliver organisational psychology support. Organisational psychology in time might form a more central component of content that is delivered at undergraduate and postgraduate level for sport psychology students. Being exposed to organisational psychology theory in the years' leading up to entering the applied field will develop and enhance student's awareness and understanding.

Upon entering the organisation, I did not believe that my role would involve the delivery of organisational psychology, however over time this aspect of my delivery became more important due to demands from those within Burrington City FC, my own personal beliefs, and an attempt to facilitate the development of a more functional organisation. In my case, I believed that if I had not taken on the roles that the club required of me that my contract could have been ended, and somebody else employed. In the first instance, my understanding and knowledge of organisational psychology was not adequate to effectively deliver what was required of me, therefore I found myself frantically searching the literature, and seeking the support of my supervisory team. For example, I was required to manage delicate and challenging relationships between different stakeholders, and departments. Some of these conflicts arose due to a number of poor results at 1st team level, and consequently increased pressure that was put on staff to demonstrate their value within the organisation. Research has supported this and suggested that professional football is a performance-driven, high pressure environment that places a short term focus on achieving immediate results (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007; Nesti, 2010). Chandler et al. (2016) suggested that this level of pressure often leads to conflict, and it can be the sports psychologist who is allocated the organisational role of managing the consequences. Although the organisational role that I was delivering served a purpose, and was acknowledged as a benefit of the sports psychology development program by players, staff, and parents during the evaluation phase, I believe that this role may have influenced some of the other comments by coaches. The coaches suggested that the psychological development program had little influence in making the players 'tough'. The organisational role that I was delivering was at odds with this aspect of psychological development. More specifically, I believe that I was viewed as a caring, supportive individual, as a result of this I was allocated the role of facilitating inter-departmental communication, and dealing with

conflict. My displays of empathy, genuineness, and care were not in line with the coaches' comments on the level of aggression, masculinity, and toughness that players required in order to have a successful football career. In situations such as this, by refraining from delivering organisational psychology I might have been perceived differently by the coaches (e.g., less caring) and more suited to developing mental toughness.

6.2.3 Reflecting upon the ethnographic research process

Creating meaningful change through ethnography

My journey as a practitioner-researcher was exciting, challenging, emotional, and rewarding. The use of ethnographic research methods allowed for a depth of data collection that would not be possible through an alternative research approach (e.g., questionnaires, semi-structured interviews alone) (Krane & Baird, 2005). This thesis highlighted the benefits of practitioner-researcher ethnography as a method to deepen our understanding of complex cultures that are little understood. Prior to this piece of research, there had been very few published articles from those working within professional football in the role of sport psychologist since the introduction of the EPPP, especially by female researchers. As a result of employing ethnographic research methods, it is suggested that we now have a deeper understanding of the psychological challenges that youth footballers face within professional football, the impact of the professional football culture on the identity and development of a neophyte sport psychology practitioner, and what might constitute effective sport psychology practice in this environment. Furthermore, it places specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller and more meaningful context within the objectives of the thesis (Tedlock, 2000).

With relation to my role as an applied practitioner, the ethnographic methods enabled me to develop a greater level of self-awareness, and ability to think critically (Knowles, et al., 2012). For example, engaging in reflective practice on a daily basis over the three-year duration had very real benefits in helping me to understand, and make sense of the data that was collected (Loughran, 2002), and develop as an applied sports psychology practitioner. I reflected on my interactions, professional relationships, trials, and tribulations. Therefore, it is suggested that practitioner-researcher ethnography does not only pose potential benefits for applied practice, and knowledge of others within the field, Dearnley (2005) stated that it is also influential in developing the individual who is conducting the research.

However, the ability to achieve a practitioner-researcher ethnography as free from bias as possible, ethically sound, fulfilling a dual role, and maintaining an appropriate level of analytical distance was not an easy task. When it came to choosing the narratives that I was going to present I had to drop any bias, and in line with Ladkin (2004), go with what emerged from the data. In relation to this, in chapter 2, I reflected on some of the moral and ethical dilemmas that I faced during the research process. For example, managing the challenges surrounding confidentiality of both the organisation and the individuals that exist within it, and the complexities of the insider-outsider relationship. Each of the challenges that was discussed in chapter 2 posed a significant threat to my identity. In that sense, a variety of support mechanisms such as peer support, supervisor meetings, and an ethnography club may help researchers to better cope and deal with the situations that they may face.

6.3 Practical Implications

There are several practical implications that have emerged from the data collected across the three year PhD duration. The following sub-sections will explore such implications with relation to applied sports psychology practice, the EPPP, and professional training and education.

6.3.1 Applied sports psychology practice

The first practical implication for applied sports psychologists who aspire to work in professional football is the increasing opportunities for sports psychologists to deliver their work at an organisational as opposed to individual level (Serra de Queiroz *et al.*, 2016). In line with this, chapter 4 highlighted that a number of challenges faced by players within Burrington City FC occurred as a result of the club culture, as opposed to performance related difficulties. The psychological development program that I delivered within Burrington City FC was primarily designed to support youth players through individual support sessions and group workshops. A secondary focus was the delivery of education sessions to key stakeholders (e.g., coaches, parents). However, over time and through on-going reflection and evaluation it became evident that I was only dealing with the symptoms of what was a bigger organisational problem. If granted the opportunity, future sports psychology delivery within professional football may include an initial period of observation to explore the best approach to applied practice. During this period of observation, the sport psychologist may start to develop relationships with different stakeholders, and develop a better understanding of the core beliefs and values of the organisation by observing individuals in and around the training and match day complexes, listening to, and eavesdropping on conversations between players, staff, and other stakeholders in the organisation. Following a period of observation, the sport psychologist might present their findings back to the organisation, and identify potential methods of working to support the development of a high performance

culture. More specifically, it is suggested that future sports psychology practice within professional football may best be delivered at an organisational level with the primary focus of creating an optimal environment for psychological development, and in turn performance. In line with this, it is believed that by creating an optimal development environment, players may have a smoother development journey within professional football clubs. However, the sports psychologist may face a number of challenges when attempting this in practice. For example, stakeholder attitudes, and beliefs may present a significant barrier. Without the support of key stakeholders, it is suggested that the sports psychologist may find it close to impossible to create a positive culture change. Secondly, influencing a football club on an organisational level may be a difficult and time consuming process. For those sports psychologists who are only employed on short-term contracts this may not be realistic. Further research would be beneficial here with a focus on what constitutes effective sport psychology practice at youth and senior levels within a range of clubs.

Secondly, applied sports psychology practitioners who operate from within an organisation as opposed to on a consultancy basis should be aware of what different stakeholders within the organisation believe the sports psychologists' role is (Poczwardowski, et al., 2004). If clear guidelines were put into place prior to a sports psychologist entering an organisation, it is suggested that the sports psychologist may be more aware of the club's requirements and consequently deliver a more effective service. However, if this is not possible the sport psychologist might deliver a session to key stakeholders to discuss and clarify their beliefs on sport psychology as a discipline, and the role and responsibilities of a sport psychology practitioner. This would be beneficial in helping the sport psychologist to develop an understanding of the current knowledge level of stakeholders, and how they might align their own methods of practice with the preferred outcomes of the organisation. In some instances, this may not be in line with the sport

psychologists beliefs, and philosophy of practice. However, applied practitioners then have the ability to make an informed choice on their position within the organisation.

The final practical implication relates to those females who aspire to work in male dominated sports. Prior to entering the applied setting, I was aware from the work of Roper (2008), and the suggestions of Nesti (2010) that female sports psychologist's may face a different set of challenges to their male counterparts. However, Roper's (2008) work was conducted in the USA across a range of collegiate sports. Given the vast differences in professional sport in the UK, and collegiate sport in the USA, and the fact that in America soccer was not one of the sports that was studied, it is suggested that her findings were not generalizable to this thesis. However, Nesti (2010) commented on the opportunities for female sports psychologists within professional football based on his experiences of working in the Premier League. He suggested that given the feminine nature of sports psychology as a discipline, female practitioners may be more easily accepted to deliver this role. Further to this, Nesti (2010) noted that there are currently female sports psychology practitioners operating successfully at a youth level within professional football academies. Some of my early experiences within Burrington City FC were influenced by my gender in a negative way. An example of this was the comment from an U14 player's parent regarding 'how it would go down' me being a female. Events such as the above were not uncommon during my first few months as a practitioner-researcher at Burrington City FC, and it is my belief that some of the displays of power, dominance, and control by other stakeholders towards myself occurred as a result of my gender. In the first instance, this had a negative impact on my feelings of self-worth and belonging in the organisation. It enhanced my feelings of being an outsider, and made me question whether I was capable of truly attaining the respect of key stakeholders.

However, in line with the suggestions of Nesti (2010), being a female also helped to break down some of the barriers of the discipline. For example, I recall an individual support session where a second year scholar divulged a number of deeply personal issues. Following the session, he told me that he would not have been able to speak to a male about it, because of the perceived need for male individuals to show strength in the presence of each other. In this sense, I feel that being a female helped players to be more accepting and willing to speak about their emotions. In addition to this, the staff commented on a change in the culture towards a more open and supportive environment. Over time, I believe that my gender became less of a factor within the organisation. Rather, my personal characteristics (Chandler, 2014), and efficacy as a sports psychology practitioner is what other stakeholders used as a basis for my judgement. From this finding, it is suggested that although female sports psychology practitioners may face some difficulties in their initial acceptance within professional football clubs, this should not discourage them from working within these environments. As a result of gender, we are also afforded opportunities, and have conversations with clients, and other stakeholders that males may not experience. This is not to suggest that one gender is better positioned to deliver sport psychology support than another, but to acknowledge that as a function of gender there may be differences in the experiences that applied sport psychology practitioners have. Furthermore, it is suggested that a sports psychologist should place a focus on developing their personal characteristics through reflection, attendance at conferences, supervised experience, peer meeting, and other forms of continued professional development activities as ultimately, it is these that will be the difference between those practitioners who are successful, or otherwise.

6.3.2 The Elite Player Performance Plan

There are a number of implications for the EPPP as a youth development framework resulting from the findings of this research project. Firstly, it is suggested that the sports psychology guidelines provided by the EPPP as part of their academy document need to be more comprehensive. More specifically, this may include counselling psychology, guidelines regarding individual support sessions, and a range of topics to be delivered across the different development stages (FP, YDP, PDP). Examples of workshops are; career transitions, athlete identity, and loans. These workshops may educate players on the psychological impact of career related challenges within their roles. As part of this, the EPPP may help to further increase the use of sports psychology within professional football clubs by introducing an hours of delivery system. For example, the EPPP clearly states minimum coaching hours to be delivered each week for players in the FP, YDP, and PDP. Introducing something similar for the delivery of psychological support would advocate its use, and highlight the important focus from the Premier League on psychological development. In addition to this, it would provide sports psychologists with a grounding regarding level of engagement with the players, and allow them to further demonstrate the value and effectiveness of sports psychology. This engagement may take a number of delivery methods, for example on-pitch psychological development through work with coaches, the psychological analysis of match footage with individual players, and sports psychology focused practical sessions.

Secondly, it is suggested that given the beliefs of coaches regarding the lack of impact of sports psychology within Burrington City FC there is scope for a more holistic and in-depth coach education program to be delivered by the FA or the Premier League. In 2002, the FA introduced the ‘psychology for football strategy’ in an attempt to better educate coaches on sports psychology.

Since this, a number of coaching courses and awards have been developed based on the 5C concept (confidence, control, concentration, communication, commitment) developed by Harwood in 2008. Although coaches now have a greater awareness of these concepts specifically, as a result of the formalization of sports psychology delivery by the Premier League in 2012 it is suggested that something more comprehensive is required. For example, BPS, or BASES, or representatives from each accreditation body with expertise in sports psychology, may work together with the FA/ Premier League to design a more comprehensive coach education program. The aim of this may be to build upon the existing content, and also develop the skill set of those individuals that are recruited in coaching positions. This may be delivered within each football club, or externally from the organisation as part of training days. Coaches may receive greater education on sports psychology as a discipline beyond the 5C psychological characteristics, both with relation to how it may facilitate performance enhancement, and personal development. For example, there may be education regarding the different approaches to sports psychology, and the value of these in dealing with different psychological issues, (e.g., MST and counselling). Finally, more complex topics such as working alongside a sports psychologist (e.g., sports psychology focused coaching sessions, mechanical aspects of psychological support delivery), and the importance of confidentiality in encouraging players to have an open and honest dialogue with the sports psychologist may be delivered to coaches as they progress with their career. By engaging in a program such as the above it is suggested that coaches may develop a better understanding of sports psychology, and in turn might be more willing to accept its integration within the youth development framework.

Finally, if more in-depth guidelines were introduced regarding the delivery of psychological support, and a more comprehensive sports psychology education program was delivered to

coaches, a more appropriate evaluation procedure should be conducted. Currently, within the framework of the EPPP, the category status of each academy is evaluated via a Premier League audit every three years (The Premier League, 2012). This audit explores all aspects of academy practice, and is conducted by two non-biased representatives of the Premier League. In the future, it is suggested that the sports psychology aspect of the EPPP framework should be monitored by experts in applied sports psychology. More specifically, the audit of this aspect of the program may be conducted by either the Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology at the BPS, or those with expertise in psychology at BASES. This would allow for a more detailed critique of the psychological development programs being delivered within professional football clubs, and appropriate guidance to improve practice. If current services were being more appropriately evaluated by those seen as experts in the field, it is suggested that the quality of support provided might increase, and subsequently sport psychology become a more accepted aspect of talent development within professional football clubs.

6.3.3 Professional training and education

With relation to the practical implications that were outlined regarding the delivery of organisational psychology, it is suggested that there needs to be an increased focus during professional training, and student education on this topic. This is supported by researchers (Chandler, 2014; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Nesti, 2010) who have suggested that sports psychologists are often not adequately trained in organisational psychology, and therefore do not possess the competencies or authority to address organisational issues. The findings from this thesis suggest that there would be huge value in exposing trainee sports psychology practitioners to a greater focus on organisational psychology and cultural concepts. As a neophyte practitioner my own exposure to organisational psychology occurred during the completion of an MSc course

in Sport Psychology. In contrast, throughout my professional training organisational psychology was not considered as one of the core workshops, rather it was my supervisors own experiences within demanding and elite sports cultures that resulted in discussions on this topic. Professional training pathways might focus on encouraging trainees to develop professional relationships, understand organisational culture, and develop the skills to facilitate organisational change. This could be done using the methods previously outlined, individual placements, and role-plays. The final focus is particularly relevant for those who aspire to work within professional football due to the high staff and player turnover rates within the game, exemplified by my own experiences and statistics by the LMA (League Managers Association, 2015). At postgraduate level, sports psychology courses may incorporate a module with a focus on organisational psychology, and explore the impact of culture on the role of a sports psychologist. In addition to greater education through practitioner education and training, it is suggested that trainee's supervisors may also play a significant role in increasing their student's awareness of organisational psychology, particularly if they possess appropriate theoretical knowledge, such as the work of Fletcher and Wagstaff on organisational psychology in elite sport, and more recently Eubank and colleagues on understanding high performance sport environments.

For an individual to operate as an organisational psychologist, it is suggested that they must have an in-depth understanding of the culture that they exist within. In line with this, there would be great value in introducing a focus on organisational culture within professional training and education routes. More specifically, this may include education on the realities of working in professional, and elite sport organisations (Eubank *et al.* 2014). At undergraduate and postgraduate levels, this might incorporate sociology literature from those with experience in elite sport contexts, such as Parker (1995, 1995), Roderick (2006), and Cushion (2001). This would be

beneficial in helping students to better understand the social context of sporting environments that they one day may work within. During professional training this may be delivered through a series of workshops presented by guest speakers from within a specific sport culture. These speakers may discuss the culture of the organisation that they work within, the personal characteristics that are needed to be successful within this culture, and offer case study examples.

Chapter 3 of the thesis illuminated a number of challenges that I faced as a trainee sports psychology practitioner. The result of some of these experiences was overwhelming feelings of isolation, and a lack of belief in my ability as a practitioner. A stronger support network between professional training candidates, increased focus on peer support, and clearer guidelines regarding supervisor mentorship may all help to better support practitioners with the challenges that they face regarding adherence to practice whilst in challenging cultural environments. This support network might consist of support groups that are strategically positioned across the UK. Those completing professional training might be offered the opportunity to attend a number of meetings across the year, where they can discuss experiences, practitioner challenges, and professional development. It is further suggested that this may go beyond the completion of professional training and continue throughout the career span of the applied sports psychology practitioner. The benefit of this may be to help support the healthy development of a professional identity (Gearing, 1999), encourage a supportive environment for all applied practitioners, and increase practitioner retention rates within elite sport.

Finally, in line with the suggestions of Chandler *et al.*, (2016), an increased focus on the development of personal skills, as opposed to hours of practice accumulated would be beneficial for the development of competent, and effective applied sports psychology practitioners. Self-awareness is highlighted as one personal characteristic in particular that would be beneficial in

helping young trainees to cope with the challenges that they face and develop as professionals. More specifically, a strong sense of self might act as a repellent to the continual scrutiny, and pressure that applied sports psychology practitioners may experience in elite sport environments. Literature suggests that a high level of self-awareness may help to contribute to the positive development of an identity (Littlewood & Nesti, 2011; Mitchell, et al., 2014; Tod, et al., 2017). In a practical sense, this may be delivered through education on reflective practice, and critical discussions with supervisors to discuss challenging aspects of practice. Finally, it is believed that critical moments as defined by Nesti and Littlewood (2011) are essential for the development of self-aware applied sports psychology practitioners.

6.4 Limitations

The single case study design of the research posed a limitation with regards to the generalization of data (Bowles, 2011). Morales (2006) suggested that since the construction of theories is based on generalizations, focusing research on a single case leads to questions regarding the applicability of findings to other areas. Furthermore, Small (2009) noted that generalizing findings from data collected using ethnography is of concern. I (the researcher) acknowledge that the data collected in this study arose as a function of the organisation in which the research was conducted, and therefore the findings may not be generalizable across other sport contexts. More specifically, chapter 2 and chapter 3 of the thesis explored my experiences as an applied sports psychology practitioner of conducting a practitioner-researcher ethnography within Burrington City FC. The narratives that are illuminated in these chapters may not be representative of other sports psychology practitioner's experiences. There are a number of potential reasons for this, firstly my experiences were inevitably impacted by the specific cultural characteristics of Burrington City FC, and those who operate within it (players, staff). In addition to this, my own personal

characteristics (e.g., age, gender), career development stage, and beliefs/values served to further shape my time at the club. Therefore, it is questionable whether other individuals delivering psychological support in different football clubs across the UK would have similar experiences. However, others have reported similarities (e.g., Cushion, 2001; Parker, 1995; Roderick, 2006). Alternative research methods, for example semi-structured interviews that explored a greater number of applied practitioner's delivery journeys in professional football might have contributed to a broader understanding of practitioner experiences. However, it is suggested that they would not allow for such in-depth, and personal accounts of applied practice. Further to this, to date there are no other practitioners who have conducted such an extensive piece of research embedded within a professional football club.

Questions regarding the generalizability of findings are also pertinent for data that was collected on the lived experiences of players within Burrington City FC. The challenges experienced by players at Burrington City FC might not be representative of other clubs across the UK and Europe, especially when we consider the broad range in playing level, financial state, and youth development set-ups within these environments. For example, some clubs recruit and sign foreign players whilst they are still within the foundation phase of youth development, which may pose a new set of challenges for a player to overcome. Despite this, the findings from chapter 4 were closely related to previous work conducted by Cushion (2001), Parker (1996), and Roderick (2006) from within professional football clubs. Each researcher highlighted the masculine, authoritarian, and challenging culture that exists for staff and players within professional football. This demonstrates that over a period of 20 years, the football culture has been reluctant to change, and therefore it is suggested that there are dominant cultural features within professional football clubs that are generalizable within a UK context.

The second limitation of the research was the question of believability (Rinehart, 1998). This issue arose during a discussion with one of my supervisory team regarding my own insecurities as to why the reader should believe the data. Kiesinger (1998) identified and acknowledged this as a potential issue, and suggested that the fiction like qualities of evocative narratives can sometimes make researchers feel uncomfortable, and raise questions about their validity. In an attempt to combat this, the narratives that were presented through the thesis illuminated personal and sensitive topics, without holding back details. With regards to my own experiences, narratives were based on those events that had a long lasting and significant impact on my identity and development as a sports psychology practitioner (Woolcott, 1990). Frequent discussions with my supervisory team helped me to further understand and make sense of the experiences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The narratives that were presented during chapter 4 were chosen as they represented events that I most frequently observed within the culture, and those that players most commonly approached me about during individual psychological support sessions.

The final limitation of the thesis is related to the data collection methods used to evaluate the psychological development program. Conducting the interviews with the participants was a challenging, and difficult experience both from a personal and research perspective. This was illuminated in chapter 2, where I reflected on the use of semi-structured interviews with participants. At first, interviewing players regarding the efficacy of a program that I had designed and delivered influenced how I interacted with the participants. For example, I recall a reluctance to probe participant's answers when they discussed the positive impact of my work. Primarily, this was because I was afraid of coming across to the participant as egotistical, and having used the session for my own personal gain. As a result of this, I over-focused on the negative aspects of the evaluation. In addition to influencing myself, the interview process might have influenced the

responses of the participants (Tierney, 2002). For example, when I conducted the interviews I was still employed as a member of staff at Burrington City FC, and therefore players might not have felt comfortable in giving an honest and open critique. However, having spent the previous 3 years interacting and working with the participants on a daily basis, it is suggested that I had developed a strong and trusting relationship that meant they would be comfortable in providing detailed responses. In addition to this, I believe that I had a sufficient level of knowledge and understanding of the participants to detect any obscurities during the discussions. In addition to this, I stressed prior to the interviews that it was important for them to be honest and provide as much detail as possible, and that the interview process would have no impact on our relationship, or their position within the organisation.

6.6 Future Research

The findings from this thesis present a number of opportunities for future research in relation to practitioner-researcher ethnography, and applied sports psychology. Firstly, it is suggested that more longitudinal practitioner-researcher ethnographies would be beneficial in deepening our understanding of sports psychology practice in a range of contexts. More specifically, this research may focus on the lived experiences of sports psychology practitioners (e.g., neophyte, experienced, male, and female) in different sports. Conducting these projects over a longitudinal period would facilitate our understanding of practitioner development experiences across time, for example, how the experiences of individuals change as a function of their development. In addition to this, accounts from practitioners working in different sports would allow us to contrast and compare sports psychology practice in different sporting contexts. Research of this kind may be beneficial for sports psychology students, and graduates, who aspire to work in elite level sport. For example, it might increase their awareness of what they may face when operating within different sport

settings. In addition to this, it would also be beneficial for more experienced applied sport psychologists in educating, and deepening our understanding of consultancy effectiveness. The result of this might be increased opportunities for sports psychology practitioners to become embedded within professional sport organisations. Furthermore, the clear transparency between research of this kind, and applied practice would be beneficial for both academics and applied practitioners in advancing knowledge.

The second avenue for future research relates to the influence of the culture within professional football on the long-term psychological development of successful and unsuccessful players. This might explore the impact of youth level players within professional football on their identity, and integration in different social environments. Prior to the completion of this research, only Parker (1996), and Littlewood (2005) had provided a detailed account of the daily lives of players with relation to their psychosocial development. The findings from this study suggest that the culture within Burrington City FC was detrimental to the long term psychological development and well-being of youth players. Further studies conducted within other professional football clubs would help us to better understand whether the findings from this study lie in isolation, or if they are generalizable across clubs in the UK (and Europe). In addition to this, it would also deepen our understanding of the conditioning effect of long-term exposure to professional football environments (Gearing, 1999). The results of studies such as this may serve to inform the design of the EPPP as a youth development framework, and consequently influence the daily working practices of professional football clubs. Since the introduction of the EPPP, there has been no published studies looking at the effectiveness of this talent development framework in supporting the psychological development of youth players. Therefore, we are yet to understand whether the

formal introduction of sport psychology by the EPPP has been successful in achieving what it set out to do.

A holistic and longitudinal examination of the challenges that are faced by players within the specific development phases in isolation (e.g., FP, YDP, PDP, Senior level) may allow for a more in-depth understanding of how player challenges change as a function of age, and stage of development. This would build upon the research findings from this study, and those of Compas *et al.* (2001). To date, only Nesti *et al.* (2012), and Nesti (2013) have used case studies to explore the experiences of elite senior level professional footballers. A clearer understanding of the challenges players face across their football careers may inform more effective sports psychology practice. Firstly, building on current research (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills *et al.*, 2012; Mitchell, 2015) sports psychologists may be better informed to identify those psychological characteristics that result in successful player development within professional football. Secondly, with an in-depth understanding of the key psychological challenges faced by players across the stages of development sports psychologists could design and implement a psychological development program that is tailored to player needs.

Finally, further research exploring the perceptions of sport staff across clubs in the Football League on what constitutes effective sports psychology practice would be beneficial. This may be carried out using a mixed methods approach with a number of category 1, 2, 3, and 4 football academies. As a result of the findings, the EPPP may develop and tailor their guidelines with relation to sports psychology. The EPPP guidelines may then be used by sports psychologists who are entering the sport for the first time to develop an immediate understanding of what football in general believes to be effective sports psychology support.

6.7 Conclusion

This thesis explored the integration and delivery of sports psychology within one professional football club over a three-year duration. The first novel feature of the research was the use of practitioner-researcher ethnographic research methods. More specifically, this research was the first of its kind conducted by a female sports psychology practitioner working in professional football over a longitudinal period. The use of this research method allowed for an in-depth understanding of the culture at Burrington City FC, and the lived experiences of those individuals who existed within it. Further to this, it enabled me to explore the impact of my experiences delivering psychological support within Burrington City FC on my professional development and identity. It is suggested that future research would benefit from the use of ethnographic research methods to illuminate complex, and little studied topics (Krane & Baird, 2005). However, ethnography is not without its own personal, moral, and ethical challenges for the researcher (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Therefore, an appropriate level of supervisory, and peer support is essential for others who wish to conduct the same type of research.

It is hoped that the research helped to deepen our current understanding of applied sports psychology delivery, particularly within a professional football context. The creative narratives that were presented demonstrated the complexity of my experiences, and that my professional development was not smooth or linear. In contrast, my journey was a rocky road signified by several challenging experiences. In summary, my own experiences as an applied practitioner ran parallel with the experiences of youth players that existed within the club. Therefore, just as players require a level of psychological support to navigate their way through this harsh, and unforgiving world, it is suggested that practitioners may also benefit from further support both during professional training and beyond.

This thesis was the first of its kind to explore the impact of the EPPP as a youth development framework. Findings that arose from each of the empirical chapters suggested that the sports psychology section of the EPPP does not account for some of the important psychological challenges that youth footballers face, particularly at an environmental and organisational level. As a result of this, there are implications for the EPPP to incorporate a more comprehensive set of guidelines that takes into consideration career transitions, and counselling psychology.

Finally, a synthesis of the data presented in each of the chapters suggests that psychological development is a complex and messy process influenced and shaped by the values, and opinions of a range of stakeholders. This was demonstrated through the differences between the perceptions of players, staff, and parents regarding the efficacy of the psychological development program that was delivered within Burrington City FC.

The methodology, and findings from this thesis are novel, and make an original contribution to current knowledge regarding applied sports psychology practice. The findings discussed above present opportunities for sports psychologists to practice more effectively within professional football environments. Secondly, this thesis may help to inform professional training bodies (BASES, BPS) education and training pathways for sports psychology practitioners. Finally, implications are outlined for the Premier League to further develop psychological support mechanisms within professional football through the framework of the EPPP.

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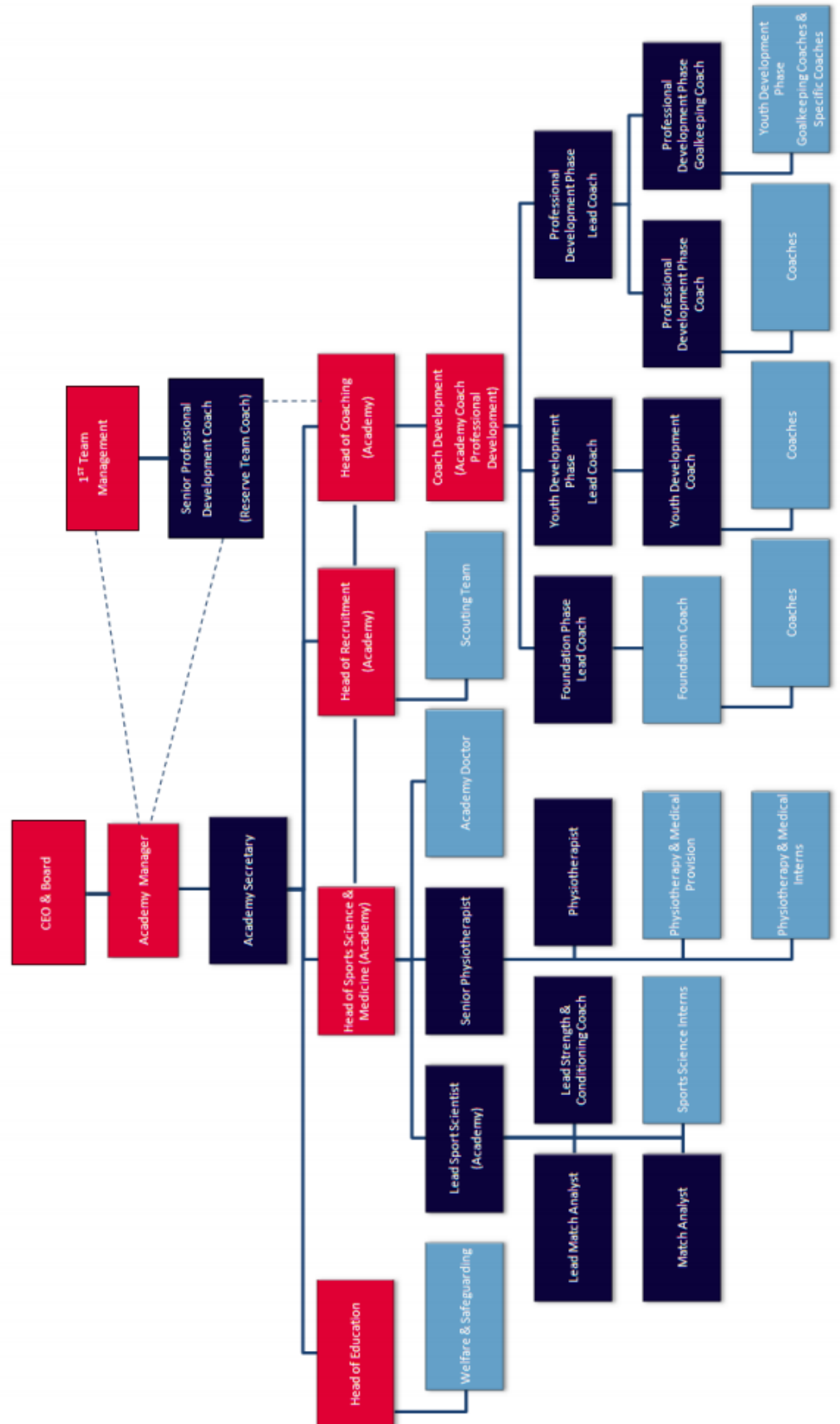
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. EPPP category 2 staffing model (Adapted from The Premier League, 2011 p.85)

12.4.2 Category 2 Academy: Example Staffing Model



Appendix 2. Sports psychology workshops delivered to players in the PDP

<i>Workshops</i>	Delivery Method	Delivery Date
<i>Goal – Setting</i>	Small Groups	August
<i>Building Confidence</i>	Each Age Group	September
<i>Imagery</i>	Each Age Group	October
<i>Lifestyle Management</i>	Small Groups	November
<i>Decision Making</i>	Small Groups	November
<i>Dealing with anxiety</i>	Each Age Group	December
<i>Emotional Control</i>	Each Age Group	January
<i>Loans & Contracts</i>	Small Groups	February
<i>Coping Skills</i>	Small Groups	March
<i>Evaluation of program</i>	Small Groups	May

Appendix 3. Sports psychology workshops delivered to players in the YD

Workshops	Delivery Method	Delivery Date	Age Groups
<i>Introduction</i>	Each age group	September	U13 - U16
<i>Goal – Setting (introduction)</i>	Each age group	October	U13 – U16
<i>Goal – Setting</i>	Small Groups	October	U13 – U16
<i>What is Confidence</i>	Each age group	November	U13 – U16
<i>Building Confidence</i>	Small Groups	November	U13 – U16
<i>Communication</i>	Small Groups	December	U13 -U16
<i>Communication/ Presentation</i>	Each age group	December	U13 – U16
<i>Imagery</i>	Each age group	January	U13 – U16
<i>Lifestyle Management</i>	Small Groups	January	U15/16
<i>Organisation and Planning</i>	Each age group	February	U15/16
<i>Anxiety (introduction)</i>	Small Groups	February	U13 – U16
<i>Dealing with anxiety</i>	Small Groups	February	U13 – U16
<i>Emotional Control</i>	Each age group	March	U13 – U16
<i>Decision Making</i>	Each age group	March	U15/16
<i>Coping Skills 1.</i>	Each age group	April	U13 – U16
<i>Coping Skills 2.</i>	Each age group	April	U13 – U16
<i>Player/Coach Dynamic</i>	Each age group	May	U13 – U16
<i>Evaluation of program</i>	Small Groups	May	U13 – U16

Appendix 4. Sports psychology education workshops delivered to support staff at Burrington City FC

Topic	Delivery Date	Coaches
<i>What is a high performance culture</i>	September	All full time
<i>Creating a high performance culture</i>	October	All full time
<i>Building Resilience</i>	November	U9 – U23
<i>A winning mentality</i>	December	U13 – U23
<i>Player Lifestyle Management</i>	January	U16 – U23
<i>Building Confidence</i>	February	All full time
<i>Dealing with Pressure</i>	March	All full time
<i>Preparing players for release/retain</i>	April	U16 – U23
<i>Evaluation of program</i>	May	All full time

Appendix 5. Sports psychology education workshops delivered to parents of players signed to Burrington City FC

Topic	Date	Parent Groups
<i>Being a parent of a child playing elite sport</i>	September	FP, YDP
<i>Dealing with parental stress</i>	October	FP, YDP
<i>Athlete identity and development stages</i>	November	FP, YDP
<i>Supporting players to develop the 5 C's</i>	December	YDP
<i>Lifestyle management</i>	January	YDP
<i>Keeping sport enjoyable</i>	February	FP, YDP
<i>Player challenges</i>	March	YDP

Appendix 6. Player's interview guide

Introduction and Background

How did you get into football?

Can you tell me a little about your life in football before you played for BCFC?

How did you come to be involved with BCFC?

Broader Life

How do you find combining your College studies with playing for BCFC?

What impact has being a full time scholar had on your broader life? Friends, Family, Finances

Scholarship

Can you talk in as much detail about your time as a scholar so far?

What is the biggest challenge of being a scholar? ... Have you dealt with anything like this before?

Psychological Development Program

Did the sports psychology program help you to cope with these challenges?

If yes... How?

If no... What support would have been beneficial

Which parts of the program were beneficial?

Probe: Performance enhancement & personal development

Which parts of the program did you not find useful and why?

Future

How do you think the sports psychology program could be further developed?

How can it best have an impact on you?

Probes: Topics, delivery method, level of support

Appendix 7. Staff interview guide

Introduction and Background

How did you come to be involved with BCFC?

Probes: playing career, education

Challenges

What are the challenges that you see players face during their time as an academy footballer?

How do you think these change as players develop across the different development phases?

Psychological Development Program

Are the issues that players are facing being addressed through the sports psychology program? If yes, how and why? If not, why?

Do you believe the psychological development program is having an impact on players?

Probe: Positive/ Negative, Performance/ Personal development

How effective have you found the psychological development program that has been delivered to the coaches and support staff this season?

Probes: Knowledge, Understanding, Value

Future

How do you think players might be better prepared psychologically for first team football?

How could sports psychology be better used at the club?

Appendix 8. Table of players selected for interview

Name of Participant	Age Group	Professional Contract	Contract up at end of season	Age joined academy
<i>Participant 1.</i>	U23	Yes	Yes	10
<i>Participant 2.</i>	U23	Yes	No	8
<i>Participant 3.</i>	U18 (2 nd year)	No	No	8
<i>Participant 4.</i>	U18 (2 nd year)	No	Yes	14
<i>Participant 5.</i>	U18 (1 st year)	No	No	7
<i>Participant 6.</i>	U18 (1 st year)	Yes	No	11

Appendix 9. Player focus group guide

Introduction and Background

How long have you been playing for Burrington City FC for?

Tell me a little bit about your training schedule and game schedule?

Challenges

What challenges have you faced/ continue to face this season?

Probe: Think about team challenges as well as individual

Are these the same or different to previous years?

Has the sports psychology program helped with your development as a player at all?

Psychological Development Program

Do you believe that the psychological development program that was delivered this season was effective?

Which parts of the program were beneficial?

Probe: Performance enhancement & personal development

Which parts of the program did you not find useful and why?

Future

How do you think you could be better supported as players going through the academy?

What changes would you like to see to the psychological development program and why?

Appendix 10. Support staff focus group guide

Introduction and Background

How did you come to be involved with BUFC?

For the purpose of the tape could you please provide a little bit of information regarding your roles?

Challenges

What are the challenges that you see players face during their time as an academy footballer?

Are there any challenges that players face at a certain age that you don't see in the other age groups?

Psychological Development Program

Are the issues that players are facing being addressed through the sports psychology program? If yes, how and why? If not, why?

Do you believe the psychological development program is having an impact on players?

Probe: Positive/ Negative, Performance/ Personal development

Has the psychological development program that has been delivered to players lived up to hopes and ambitions you had prior to the start of the season?

How effective have you found the psychological development program that has been delivered to the coaches and support staff this season?

Probes: Knowledge, Understanding, Value

Future

What do you think is the scope for sports psychology to progress within Burrington City FC?

How could sports psychology be better used at the club?

Appendix 11. Parent's focus group guide

Introduction and Background

How did your child get into football?

How did you come to be involved with BUFC?

Challenges

As a parent what are the challenges that you see players go through at an academy football club?

Probes: Inside and outside of sport

Psychological Development Program

Are the issues that players are facing being addressed through the sports psychology program? If yes, how and why? If not, why?

Do you believe the psychological development program is having an impact on players?

Probe: Positive/ Negative, Performance/ Personal development

Has the psychological development program that has been delivered to players lived up to hopes and ambitions you had prior to the start of the season?

What aspects of the program do you think are beneficial, or not beneficial?

Probe: Expand on why?

Have you found the parent education workshops beneficial?

Probe: Which and why? Parenting style, Support

Future

How do you think sports psychology could be used more beneficially in the academy?

Would you like to see any aspects of the program changed, or new topics included?

Appendix 12. Evaluation form handed to players in the YDP

Evaluation of the Psychological Development Program

Name:

Age Group:

Have you been able to transfer anything you learnt during the workshops into a game situation?

Yes

No

More comments (such as what you have used, and how it has helped your game, examples may be confidence, or controlling emotions):

Do you find the small group reviews of how the season is going helpful?

Yes

No

More comments:

Do you think your mentality has improved over the season? List your mental strengths and weaknesses in the comments box

Yes

No

More comments:

How could the program be improved in preparation for next season? Think of different topics you would like to learn about, different tasks you would like to do

Comments: